

LOOKING AT AMBIVALENCES: THE CONTRIBUTION OF A “NEW-OLD” VIEW OF INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS TO THE STUDY OF THE LIFE COURSE

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1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter has its origins in the kind invitation to present, at the PaVic-Colloquium, an idea that is receiving increasing attention in the study of intergenerational relations. Its essence can be summarized in the following hypothesis: Intergenerational relationships, especially among adult children and their parents, imply the experience of ambivalences and, consequently, require dealing with ambivalences.¹ Thus, my point of departure does not seem to be a major issue of life course research. However, at second glance, one may recall that embeddedness in intergenerational relations is crucial for personal development. Most human beings are conceived in and born into familial contexts, and parent-child relationships – as diverse as they may be – are in many ways important for the unfolding of personal abilities

Towards an Interdisciplinary Perspective on the Life Course

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and the consciousness of the self. Youth is a formative phase in the life course where intergenerational relationships are of importance, simply because their dominance may be challenged by other relationships, such as those among siblings and peers. This is also true for early adulthood. Later, through partnerships and marriages, and thus the acquisition of in-laws, there is an increase in the number of elders with whom close and intimate relationships become possible or are even expected and required. In mid-life, nowadays, most adults belong to genealogical networks involving three or even four generations. Later, obligations for the care of the very old may emerge. The rules and the practice of inheritance once more accentuate the social and material importance of intergenerational relationships and their impact for the conduct of personal lives. In addition, the institution of inheritance reminds us that any life course may also be comprehended as a link in a chain of generations.

Indeed, the study of the life course may profit from taking into account the interplay with the study of intergenerational relationships, and consequently from recent developments in this field. To this obvious statement, I would like to add two points. First, because of their omnipresence, intergenerational relations are at the core of the processes of socialization and of human sociability. This is why insights from the study of intergenerational relationships are of foremost interest for the analysis of social relationships in general, be it with regard to what they have in common with other relationships, or to where they differ from them, for instance from market relationships. My second remark is meta-theoretical. Because of the great relevance of intergenerational relations, their understanding is usually bound to moral judgments. Such normative views often penetrate scholarly descriptions. For instance, it is quite common to idealize intergenerational relations positively with reference to the concept of solidarity, or to deplore them negatively – as a notorious source of conflict. As I will show, a well-grounded theory of ambivalence allows us to overcome these biases, because it simultaneously takes into account and analyzes both perspectives. In this way, a high degree of social authenticity can be achieved, and respective normative orientations can become a deliberate topic of analysis. Moreover, we recall that general assumptions about human nature underlie the concepts used in social science research, especially about such fundamental issues as the conduct of human lives and their social organization.

However, at this point I cannot present a comprehensive account of the importance of ambivalence for the study of the life course. I must limit myself to outlining the meanings of this concept as such, and I will present the conceptual frame that I and other researchers have developed. Taking

this as a point of reference, I will also illustrate the usefulness of this approach by presenting some exemplary results of recent research. I shall concentrate on issues closely related to the study of the life course and of connected lives, and I will suggest further applications in this field.

2. AMBIVALENCE IN INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS: THE REDISCOVERY OF AN OLD EXPERIENCE

The idea of drawing on the concept of ambivalence for the study of intergenerational relationships has two sources. First, an awareness of the usefulness of ambivalence as a theoretical concept arose from a critical evaluation of the existing literature on intergenerational relationships, which in the 1990s was aptly characterized as data-rich and theory-poor (Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998). In particular, we criticized the dominance of the so-called solidarity perspective, because it presents a picture of intergenerational relationships that pays too much attention to positive aspects and too little to the innately darker ones. The solidarity perspective arose in reaction to Talcott Parsons's (1942, 1949) portrayal of the nuclear family as isolated. It holds that, to the contrary, extensive family solidarity does exist. (Shanas et al., 1968; Littwak, 1965; Sussman, 1959). Since the early 1970s, Bengtson and co-workers have continued to develop this approach in an influential series of articles and books (cf. Roberts, Richards, & Bengtson, 1991; Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994; Bengtson, Giarusso, Mabry, & Silverstein, 2002). The solidarity perspective has also been adopted by other researchers in the United States (Rein, 1994; Rossi & Rossi, 1990) and serves as a reference point for many European authors, although not without critical reservations (Attias-Donfut, 1995; Bawin-Legros, Gauthier, & Strassen, 1995; Donati, 1995; Finch & Mason, 1993; Szydlik, 2000). However, at the same time as scholars in the solidarity tradition have emphasized mutual support and value consensus, another line of research has focused on isolation, caregiver stress, family problems, conflict and abuse (Marshall, Matthews, & Rosenthal, 1993). The image of weakened family ties and the abandonment of the elderly continues to be widely held in popular opinion and in portrayals of the family in contemporary fiction and theater. Thus, some scholars, as well as the public at large, appear reluctant to accept that intergenerational relationships include solidarity and are characterized by shared values and reciprocal help. As Marshall et al. (1993, p. 47) have succinctly put it, "the

substantive preoccupations in gerontology over the past 30 years point to a love-hate relationship with the family." In a somewhat different mode, Lalive d'Épinay and Bickel (1994), summarizing their comprehensive description of the aged and their familial networks in Switzerland, refer to the tensions created between the potentials of family solidarity and the limitations imposed by contemporary social conditions. In view of such accounts, Karl Pillemer and I have proposed that the study of parent-child relations in later life must move beyond a "love-hate relationship" (Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998). The vacillation between images of mistreatment and neglect, on the one hand, and comforting images of solidarity, on the other, are not two sides of an academic argument that will ultimately be resolved in favor of one viewpoint.

Second, parallel to this theoretical evaluation, we conducted a research project at the University of Konstanz on the reorganization of families after divorce in later life, e.g. an important event in the life course (Lüscher & Pajung-Bilger, 1998). Data were collected in semi-structured interviews with 103 persons in 65 families. These interviews included questions about the way all the subjects experience intergenerational relations. Our goal was to distinguish different degrees of mutual solidarity in the aftermath of what in many cases represents a "turning point" in the lives of the individuals involved and their experience of intimate relationships. Yet, even a differentiation in terms of everyday concerns, and by content and types of relationships, did not yield conclusive results regarding the relevance of solidarity. Family members reported both instances of support and of neglect. This led us to search for a concept with which we could take into account the existence of both solidarity and conflict in the process and the understanding of intergenerational relations. The notion of ambivalence in the everyday sense (being torn in two directions) was a first and natural choice.

In the course of work along these lines, we became aware, however, that references to the experience of ambivalence in social relationships, and especially in personal relationships, which involve dependency and intimacy, have long been a topic of popular wisdom and of literary writings, even before the term existed. Indeed, insights into what we call in modern language "ambivalence" between parents and adult children can be traced back to the beginnings of human society. In Greek mythology, some of the greatest sagas depict what we now refer to as ambivalence. The best known of these is the tragic drama of the relationship between Oedipus and his father and mother. Reinharz (1986) gives an informative overview on "loving and hating one's elders" as "twin themes in legend and literature."

She refers, among other examples, to the tragedy of Uranus and his sons, Hamlet as well, she tells us, can be read as a portrait of intergenerational relations. Peter von Matt (1995) presents a comparable and very colorful overview of the theme under the provocative title "Verkommene Söhne, missratene Töchter" (Degenerate Sons, Misguided Daughters). He draws a line from the biblical story of Absalom to the admonitory children's book *Der Struwwelpeter* (Shock-headed Peter—a classic of moralizing German children's literature) and recalls the complex relationships described in Theodor Fontane's *Effie Briest* and in Kafka's tale "The Metamorphosis." We may add, as one more illustration certainly known to many readers, Philip Roth's novel *American Pastoral* as an example of ambivalence in recent American literature.² Furthermore, ambivalence can be seen as an ongoing theme in the life-script or biography. Kierkegaard could serve as one of many examples. An impressive study with ambivalence as a latent theme is Lee's (1998) study of generativity in the life course of the dancer Martha Graham.

In everyday life, ambivalences are often experienced, for example, in negotiations over caregiving. They can also be found by examining the overall history of a given relationship. Seen this way, ambivalence is a conceptual tool for evaluating specific situations, as well as for studying the development and institutionalization of the self in the life course. This brief account of recent approaches to the study of intergenerational relations (and given the already-mentioned interplay: to the study of the life course) that draw upon the idea of ambivalence illustrate why it is appropriate to speak of a "new-old perspective." However, in order to become a useful tool for contemporary social research, a complete, detailed conceptualization is needed.

3. CONCEPTUALIZING AMBIVALENCE

3.1. Elements of a Comprehensive Definition

In the light of the foregoing, it seems reasonable to start with a brief look at the original formulation of the term. As far as we know, ambivalence was conceived and first introduced by the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler (1910) as one of four core symptoms of schizophrenia. Yet, soon thereafter he argued that ambivalence is not merely a symptom of mental illness, but can also be experienced and thus observed in everyday life. He distinguishes between affective and cognitive ambivalence and points out that the two are closely intertwined (Bleuler, 1914, p. 98). His text already contains a reference to ambivalence in intergenerational relationships (p. 103). Freud first

used the concept in an article on the theory of transference (e.g. also with regard to social relationships!). Later, he included it in his theory of the Oedipus complex, as is concisely and clearly demonstrated in a short essay, "Some reflections on schoolboy psychology" (Freud, 1914). Freud thus applied ambivalence to the analysis of an exemplary intergenerational phenomenon, as well as assigning it a role in the life course.

This is not the place for a more detailed history of the concept, its reception and its adaptation in different scholarly discourses. Taking into account the major contributions and arguments in the existing literature,³ I would list the following elements as constituents of a comprehensive understanding of ambivalence:

- The experience of diametrically opposed (polarized) structures and forces in the dynamic fields of individual (and collective) actions and respective relationships.
- The insight that these experiences are relevant for the identities (selves) of the actors (individuals, in certain contexts also collective actors). In other words, the experience of ambivalence and the ability to cope with it can be understood as an aspect of human agency.
- The assumption that these polarizations will be interpreted as irreconcilable as long as the actors belong to a certain field of action (or situation) and are concerned, in this context, with the reflection of these tasks. This field of action can be brief, e.g. a turning point, or extend over a longer period of time (for instance becoming a parent).⁴
- The assumption that the experience of ambivalences and the ways of dealing or coping with them can be systematically connected with the aspects of psychological functioning, of the logic of social relations and social structures, including the regulation of social control and power.

In view of the background of the concept's history and its acceptance in the social sciences, I would like to propose the following *definition*: For purposes of sociological research on intergenerational relations, it is useful to speak of ambivalence when polarized simultaneous emotions, thoughts, volitions, social relations and structures that are considered relevant for the constitution of individual or collective identities are (or can be) interpreted as temporarily or even permanently irreconcilable.

Taking this attempt at a comprehensive analytical definition as a reference point, we find, in scholarly texts, two different usages. First, the term can serve as an interpretative (or explanatory) concept. This is, in fact, its primary use in macro-sociological texts as, for instance, in the widespread characterization of "post-modernity" as pervaded by ambivalence.

References to social reality are confined to generalizations, based mostly on highly aggregated, generalized data. Descriptions are sometimes presented in the form of "ideal-types" or "model personalities" such as Bauman's (1997) proposed "tourist" or "player." This usage is also common in research reviews, for instance in Cohler's text about young adults "coming out" as gay or lesbian and their parents (see below). Second, the concept of ambivalence may be used as a "research construct." Here, the goal is to apply the concept in research, such as in surveys, experiments, observations and the analysis of documents. For this purpose, an explicit definition is necessary — one that can serve as the reference point for formulating specific hypotheses and constructing research instruments.

We can hypothesize that people must live with ambivalences and that they can cope with them in more or less competent, productive ways. People can even create ambivalences, as mentioned above with regard to the works of creative writers and artists. Deliberately constructing ambivalences can also be a strategy in social interaction. This possibility is another reason to view ambivalences as both opportunities and as burdens. In this regard, the understanding of ambivalence suggested here differs from other usages where more or less explicitly — the term bears a negative connotation. This is true, for instance, of the term's usage in characterizing styles of attachment between mothers and children, as well as in other typologies.

Closeness and intimacy may reinforce or strengthen the susceptibility to ambivalence. An important precondition of ambivalence is dependency (Smelser, 1998), which begins with birth (or even during pregnancy), continues through childhood and youth into adulthood, and in many cases even into the later phases of the life course. It manifests itself very early in the needs for nurture, care, protection and education. Beyond these immediate obligations, and in the course of fulfilling them, parents develop and acquire specific information and particular knowledge about their individual child as a person. This knowledge reinforces the parents' power to control and to discipline the child, not only while he or she is young, but also in later life phases. Over the intergenerational life course, the direction of dependency between children, parents and older or younger generations may become more complicated — support and care are specific instances explored in this book. Yet the authority of older persons, established early in life, may persist as another source of ambivalence, even as situations arise that lead to a potential or actual reversal of dependency. Cohler and Grunebaum's (1981, pp. 120ff., 197ff.) studies of the relationships of mothers and daughters in Italian immigrant families provide many convincing illustrations of this process (see below). More generally, ambivalences in the past and the

present may offer an interesting topic in the study of life reviews, both in scholarly work (Staudinger, 1989) and in the curricula of courses offered on practical gerontology.

The contemporary relevance of ambivalence can be deduced from a close examination of the structural and cultural conditions of present Western (postmodern) societies. On the macro-sociological level, population dynamics have created a frame in which ambivalence easily emerges. The rise in life expectancy, attributable to improved living conditions for increasingly large segments of the population, was accompanied by a decrease in infant mortality. As a child's chances of survival increased, the possibility of seeing it as an individual person also increased. A decrease in the birth rate was a logical consequence. Childhood and youth soon came to be seen as specific phases of the life course calling for their own institutions - for instance, public schooling. The same observation can be made with respect to the other end of the life course via the recognition of aging as a life stage calling for its own institutions. The demarcation of different periods or segments of the life course has led to a heightened consciousness of the importance of relationships between age groups, or in other words, between generations. This has been true especially in the realm of the family, and also in society as a whole. The development of social welfare was another factor contributing to this demarcation of life stages and of intergenerational relationships. In many instances, structural conditions for both dependence and autonomy were thereby created. Seen in this way, the concept of ambivalence is another possibility to relate the analysis of the life course to the study of contemporary society and the dynamic interplay of generations and their cultural manifestations (see for example Edmunds & Turner, 2002a, b; Blossfeld, this volume).

3.2. Proposal for a Research Module

The foregoing discussion represents a background for new applications in research and respective operationalizations.⁵ The concern shared by the study of intergenerational relations and life course analysis for the development of personal identity (or the self) through interaction and institutionalization is a major point of reference and allows us to concomitantly pay attention to social relationships. This approach is compatible with a two-dimensional view of personal identity, particularly with G.H. Mead's (1938) notion of the self as emerging from the interplay between "I" and "me," where "I" refers to spontaneous subjectivity and "me" refers to

generalized others or, more generally speaking, to the interplay between a subjective and an institutional component of the self. Many interpersonal models of personality explicitly refer to Mead. For example, Leary (who developed a circumplex model that describes personality as located between the poles of love vs. hate and dominance vs. submission) speaks of Mead as a "creative watershed to which later theories of interpersonal relations can trace their sources" (Leary, 1957, p. 101).

We can see in the juxtaposition between the subjective and the institutional dimensions a *primary* condition for the experience of ambivalences. In addition, within the module presented below, a *secondary* condition is suggested by hypothesizing that both dimensions of an intergenerational relationship, the subjective as well as the individual, can be influenced and shaped by fundamental polarizations. Thus, the module is based on a "twofold" notion of ambivalence. This implies a departure from the everyday understanding of the term.

The "personal" or "subjective" dimension can be characterized as follows: Parents, children and the members of other involved generations share a certain degree of similarity. While some of this similarity can be attributed to biological inheritance, no inheritance is total, insofar as individual parents and individual children are never genetically identical. Their similarity is reinforced by the intimacy of interactive learning processes, which creates a potential for closeness and subjective identification. At the same time, the biological equipment of each organism is different. Sociologically speaking, processes of maturation increase difference and diversity. Ultimately, children develop different personal identities than their parents. In order to create a schematic representation that can be used in different contexts, two rather abstract labels are needed. To account for not only the socio-spatial, but also for the socio-temporal aspects, we propose - for the subjective component - the terms "convergence" and "divergence." These two polarities can serve as umbrellas for a variety of attributes. Convergence includes such relational attributes as loving, warm, solicitous, reliable and close. Divergence is characterized as cool, easy-going, indifferent and superficial.

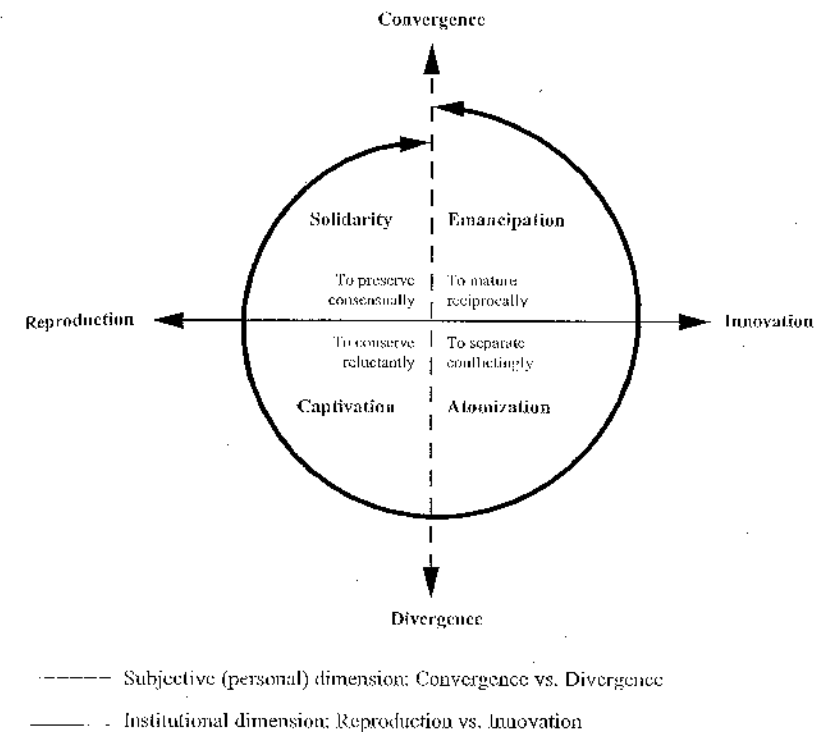
For the structural-institutional component, we can conceive of a polar opposition between a desire to preserve the traditional social forms or structures of relationships and a desire for dramatic change. Neither is fully realizable. For instance, although children may choose a way of organizing their private lives that is vastly different from that customary in their family of origin, some ties to childhood experiences may remain, even if only in that they provide a negative background. As technical designations, taking

into account again the socio-temporal as well as the socio-spatial aspects, the terms "reproduction" and "innovation" appear useful to express the idea of a dynamic polarization. Here, reproduction includes relational attributes such as inflexible, restrictive and "stuck in a rut." Innovation is expressed by terms such as open to new experiences, changeable and so on.

We can represent these considerations in the form of a module (or diagram). In this way, it is possible to analytically deduce four basic modes of experiencing and dealing with intergenerational ambivalences. Referring to empirical findings and their discussion, as well as to conceptual considerations, we went through different phases of representation.⁶ We also took into account criticisms that representation in the form of a circumplex-model suggests a static typology, in other words, one where a certain way of dealing with ambivalences is viewed as finite. Overcoming this limitation is highly desirable in the field of life course studies. It seems likely that individual modes of experiencing ambivalences and coping with them change as people move through different contexts and segments of their lives.

In order to visualize the dynamics of development e.g. the possibility to move from one type of experience and of coping to another, we suggest using the geometric form of a spiral. As for characterizations of the modes of ambivalence, the already-existing descriptions seem still useful. Thus, the modified module (graphic representation) can be presented and commented on in the following way (see also Lüscher & Pajung-Bilger, 1998; Lüscher & Lettke, 2002, 2004; as well as Lang, 2004; Brannen, 2003):

1. *Solidarity* refers to reliable support, or the willingness of the generations to provide each other with services of a not necessarily reimbursable sort. This involves the exercise of authority, but not in the sense of a one-sided exertion of influence and power. Rather, it is understood as representative action including empathy. The maxim of action can be characterized as to "preserve consensually." The members of a family feel committed to their traditions and get along with one another quite well. Thus, "solidarity" is one possible mode of dealing with intergenerational ambivalences, which in this case may be more covert than overt. (It should be noted that this term implies a specific notion of solidarity and that the term "loyalty" may also be appropriate for this dynamic.)
2. Where family members strive for *emancipation*, actions predominate that support mutual emotional attachment (convergence) and openness toward institutional change (innovation). Relationships between parents and children are organized in such a way that the individual development and personal unfolding of all family members is furthered without losing



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sight of their mutual interdependence. This general setting contains a certain amount of direct, common purpose pursued by efforts to "mature reciprocally." Tensions can be discussed openly, and temporary practical solutions can be continually negotiated.

3. *Atomization* takes into account that family cohesiveness is no longer assured by institutional ties and the subjective experiences of relational histories. The concept expresses the fragmentation of the family unit into its smallest components, specifically individual family members who "separate conflictually." Apart from the unalterable fact that family members are parents and children, they otherwise have very little in common. Actions follow a line of conflicting separation, although an awareness of generational bonds remains.

4. *Captivation* designates cases where the family as an institution is invoked to support the claims of one family member against another. A fragile relationship of subordination and superiority thereby arises in which moral claims and moral pressure are used to exert power. Usually one generation, predominantly the parental, attempts - by invoking the institutional order - to assert claims on the other or to bind them by means of moral appeals without, however, basing its claims on a sense of personal solidarity. The guiding maxim here is to "conserve reluctantly," whereby family members may try to "instrumentalize" each other, not respecting each other as subjects, but using each other as "means to an end" or as objects.

I would like to underscore the heuristic character of the module. It is used in an attempt to synthesize and visualize certain basic assumptions about intergenerational ambivalence and to suggest a first set of labels for the poles that characterize the dimension of simultaneously experienced juxtapositions. It also suggests ways to see how the micro- and macro-systems are embedded in a social ecology of action. The module, so far, emphasizes the experience of ambivalences in relationships. Metaphorically, we can evoke the image of a "dialogue with significant others." Along this line, we can think of other modi. Thus, we can comprehend the experience of ambivalences in the form of a "dialogue with oneself," and furthermore as a "dialogue with generalized others," namely as a quarrel with general normative (societal) expectations, or prescriptions.

As a general schematic representation, the module encourages further differentiations and adaptations to specific research topics. Such specifications seem to be necessary, especially in applications to life course analysis. Thus, I offer the foregoing conceptual ideas as a proposal to analytically structure the field of research in terms of the concept of ambivalence, particularly in studying intergenerational relationships. Existing studies can be characterized by the way, and to the extent that, they refer to elements of this conceptualization, or use alternatives. The conceptualization represents one of several possible approaches.

4. CURRENT STATUS OF RESEARCH

4.1. Methodological Preliminaries

Although this is not the place for a detailed methodological discussion (for this see Lettke & Klein, 2004 and the literature discussed there), I will start

with a brief comment on the possibilities to assess the experience of ambivalences and respective actions. In general, it seems more reasonable to use qualitative methods. But we should not ignore the fact that they require highly elaborate interpretative strategies in order to achieve inter-subjective validity, especially when studying accounts given in everyday language and experiences that are not always conscious. Beside the well-established research techniques in the social sciences, advances may also be possible through cooperation with literature studies. For instance, Zima (2002) provides a complex demonstration of ambivalence on the level of syntax, on one hand, and on the level of semantics and content, on the other. In quantitative research, a major obstacle lies in the general orientation of many scaling techniques, insofar as they strive for clarity, in an effort to strictly avoid contradictions. In the available research on ambivalence, the following approaches, techniques and methods are found:

1. *Interview techniques addressing the awareness of ambivalence:* Respondents can be asked about their awareness of ambivalences in a more or less direct way, by using the term itself or by presenting circumscriptions such as "feeling torn in two directions."
2. *Assessment of relationships with regard to covert ambivalence:* Subjects can be invited to characterize their relationships with polarized attributes presented separately, such as warm or loving for convergence, indifferent or superficial for divergence. If the answers are contradictory, because both of the two opposing attributes are simultaneously judged applicable, they can be transformed into indicators of ambivalence. Currently, the most widely used procedure is one proposed by Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin (1995).
3. *Use of vignettes:* Subjects are presented with situations in which they have to make ambivalent choices.

In the following overview, I concentrate on contents. It is not meant to be comprehensive, but rather illustrative. Its focus is on findings and studies, mostly of a quantitative nature, which highlight aspects that may be especially relevant for transfer from the analysis of intergenerational relations to life course research. The systematization is not a strict one, insofar as some studies obviously concern different topics.

4.2. Assessment and Differentiation of Ambivalences

Ambivalences, formulated in direct or circumscribed ways, are part of everyday life and are therefore commonplace experiences for men and women,

parents and (adult) children. This finding has frequently been confirmed. For instance, an exploratory study by Pillemer and Suitor (2002, p. 609) demonstrates, "that direct measures of ambivalence toward children can be used effectively...and that ambivalent assessments of the relationship are sufficiently widespread to be of scientific interest." In another analysis of the same data, concerning mothers' general assessments of parent-child relationships, Pillemer (2004, p. 128) concludes that the "data offer convincing evidence that parental ambivalence regarding adult children is sufficiently widespread to be of scientific interest." Similar conclusions can be drawn from studies by Connidis (2001), Jekeli (2002), Spangler (2002), and Willson, Shuey, and Elder (2003) and others.

Coenen-Huther, Kellerhals, and von Almen (1994) made a survey of the relations among kin in a representative sample of families. They discovered that a majority of relations, approximately 60%, were experienced and judged positively. However, one third (36%) referred to ambivalences, and a small minority (4%) judged their relationships negatively. More interestingly, the intensity of dilemmas rose with the frequency of mutual help. Ambivalent judgment that are considered important can be detected in about half of the cases. The authors conclude: "Intensive solidarity is not self-evident" (Coenen-Huther et al., 1994, p. 334). Reluctance is apparent, especially in long-term relations.

The ongoing studies at Konstanz (Lüscher & Lettke, 2004) confirm that if one asks about them directly, using everyday expressions, experiences of ambivalence turn out to be almost commonplace. A similar picture emerges from data concerning the answers to contradictorily formulated statements about relationships, such as, for instance, the following statement: "[Name of other person] and I often get on each other's nerves, but nevertheless we feel very close and like each other very much."

In addition, these studies yield a finding that is particularly relevant for life course research: The experience of ambivalence is not judged, per se, as negative. Of importance seems to be the level, the intensity and perhaps the context of ambivalent experiences. In other words, dealing with ambivalences may be understood as a challenge, hence in the context of the life course as a "developmental task." Here, a connection exists to the origins of the concept and its elaboration in psychotherapy, where several authors see the acceptance or the "tolerance of ambivalence" as a criterion of growth and maturity and stipulate it as a goal of therapeutic efforts.

We also find the idea of an optimal level in the experience of ambivalence, for example in a study by Mayer and Filipp (2004). This questionnaire study explored middle-aged adults' perceptions of their parents' generativity and

the interpersonal consequences of these perceptions. The subjects assessed the typicality of behaviors indicating generativity for their mother or father and evaluated the parent-child relationship on several measures (affection, manifest and latent conflicts). Some of those relations were moderated by adult children's positive regard for parental advice. Affection was highest at intermediate levels of perceived generativity, but was also linked with moderate levels of manifest parent-child conflict. In the understanding of the authors, these results "suggest to analyze effects of generativity under the aspect of intergenerational ambivalence" (Mayer & Filipp, 2004, p. 166).⁸

The idea of an optimum level is useful to interpret nonlinear variations and correlations as the expression of the interplay between contradictory forces. Such a view encourages a secondary analysis of existing research. Empirical research on kin networks shaping the life course suggests that the effect of support networks on conjugal quality is curvilinear (Holman, 1981), i.e., extremely cohesive networks might be detrimental to conjugal functioning. The interference model (Johnson & Milardo, 1984; Julien, Markman, Levcille, Chartrand, & Begin, 1994) states that social networks and conjugal relationships may actually compete. Developing relationships create anxiety in social networks, because the time and energy devoted to other relationships are thereby reduced. Thus, social network members may try to hold or regain some influence on their ego by interfering with conjugal relationships. In this perspective, strong networks may not buffer the effects of conjugal conflict, but may actually increase them, because the emergence of conjugal problems opens doors to further interference by network members with a couple's relationship. These examples also invite us to look at the dynamics of conjugal relationships as a field of overt and covert ambivalent feelings and behaviors.

In the Konstanz studies, as outlined in the conceptual part of this chapter, we emphasize the analytical distinction between an institutional and a subjective dimension of ambivalence. The data suggest evidence for the fruitfulness of this idea. In general, ambivalences on the institutional dimension seem to be more pronounced than on the subjective dimension (Lettke & Lüscher, 2001, p. 527ff.). This is true for both parents and adult children, a finding which suggests, in addition, that the so-called "generational stake" hypothesis is questionable with regard to ambivalences. Overall, then, ambivalent experiences seem commonplace, yet they differ in character. In other words, the concept of ambivalence should be differentiated. This is an idea that can be traced back to Bleuler, who distinguished ambivalences of feelings, cognitions and volitions. Other authors also adopt this view in their current work (see for instance, Lorenz-Meyer, 2004).

Brannen (2003), in a small-scale study of four-generation families, provides a typology of intergenerational relations with respect to the transmission of material assets, childcare and elder care, sociability, emotional support and values. It examines two a fortiori conditions that are thought to shape intergenerational relations: (a) occupational status continuity/mobility and (b) geographical proximity/mobility. Four types of intergenerational relations are generated by this examination: traditional solidaristic; differentiated; incorporation of difference; and reparation in estrangement. The authors look at families holistically and draw on the concept of ambivalence to describe the forces which encourage family members to preserve family patterns and divisive forces that lead them to strike out on their own. It shows how, whatever the type of intergenerational pattern, each generational unit seeks to make its own particular mark.

4.3. Diversification of Contexts

In the wider horizon of a comparative study, Fingerman and Hay (2004, p. 145ff.) "revealed that parents and their offspring do seem to experience greater ambivalence toward one another than they experience in many other social ties." However, other relationships are also considered ambivalent, in particular ties to romantic partners and ties to siblings. The authors' discussion hints at another topic of interest in the possible application of the ambivalence perspective to the study of the life course. Since nearly all the romantic partners of adults older than 20 in the Fingerman and Hay study were spouses or cohabiting partners, they hypothesize that "proximity may play a role in the experience of ambivalence with romantic partners and siblings. When siblings grow up and no longer live in the same household, there is a precipitous drop in the likelihood that they will be classified as ambivalent; teenagers classified their ties to siblings as ambivalent, whereas individuals in their 20s did not. It may simply be the case that individuals are more likely to experience ambivalence when they occupy the same life space. This pattern regarding proximity was not the same for parents and children, however. Adult children in their 20s who do not reside in their parents' households were more likely to consider their ties to their parents ambivalent than were teenagers who lived with their parents. Therefore, ambivalence between parents and children may reflect different factors than does ambivalence in other social ties" (*ibid.*). The conclusion that suggests itself is plausible: The experience of ambivalences may change over the life

course, but this is certainly only the starting point for a range of propositions still to be developed.

In an extension and follow-up of the survey done at Konstanz (see above) using as far as appropriate the same instruments, interviews have been made of two types of families facing specific tasks and difficulties. In one group, an adult child suffers from schizophrenia, in the other group, an adult child is on drugs. In both instances, the child was living in a clinical institution at the time of the research. This design allows, among others, a comparison between statements concerning the relationship to the sick child and to other children in the same family. The data show, as hypothesized, a higher frequency of ambivalence in the relationship with the sick child, and a lower relationship quality. Surprisingly enough, there is no significant difference in feelings of connectedness to the children in the families (Brand, 2004; Rudolf, 2004; Burkhardt, 2005).

Taking into account additional findings, the general conclusion for this study is the conclusion is justifiable that most parents distinguish among their children in many ways, yet they feel close to and committed to all of them. These results give rise to certain doubts and criticisms of the holistic view of families propagated by some popular systemic approaches used in family therapy. More generally, we may again observe that the usage of indicators of ambivalence, i.e. the ambivalence perspective, promises an understanding of families that reflects their internal dynamics and therefore comes close to real life. The subjective attitudes and orientations of family members are taken into account without neglecting the role of institutionalized bonds.

The concern for parent-child relationships in exceptional families is also reflected in studies of families with gay or lesbian children. A large body of research is available; Cohler (2004) offers a comprehensive overview drawing upon the interpretative power of the concept of ambivalence. Among the many topics covered, of particular interest in the life course perspective is the process of "coming out." It is subject to several forms of ambivalence and requires different strategies of coping, e.g. with regard to personal sameness and difference, to traditional and new life styles. Parents may also have the task of revealing their child's sexual orientation to kin and friends.

On another level, a kind of institutional ambivalence may be implied in the way legislation deals with homosexual partnerships. Should they be treated as just another form of marriage, or should a special legal institution be created (e.g. civil partnerships or civil unions, as is the case in most European countries)? Do gays and lesbians themselves want to accept rules derived from traditional marriage, especially with regard to the dissolution

of the relationship? Quite to the point, the German author Lautmann (1996) uses the notion of "ambivalences of the law."

Extending the horizon, it is easy to propose other family configurations as breeding grounds for latent and manifest ambivalences. In single-parent families, relationships with the absent father or mother and struggles for custody may bear all the features of an enduring conflict, putting the child in an ambivalent position. In the case of foster families, the child as well as those who have institutional responsibilities for the arrangement, such as social workers, may find themselves caught up in struggles between the biological mother and the so-called social parents (or legal parents). Here too, legal regulations and procedures may be relevant to the search for a way of pragmatically coping with ambivalences. In Germany, this is the case for the legal obligations of adult children to support their parents when they are poor and need institutional care (Hoch & Lüscher, 2002).

Divorce at all stages of marital and generational biographies may accentuate, often over a longer period or for an entire lifetime, overt and covert ambivalences. One is reminded of the proposal by Cherlin (1981) to view remarriage as an incomplete institution. In these and comparable cases a specific and elaborate operationalization of the concept of ambivalence is needed if one wants to go beyond simple plausibility. As a result of these efforts, one can expect, as mentioned above, at least a higher level of authenticity with regard to the diversities and the dramas of everyday life. One should also strive for findings, which systematically illuminate the consequences of different levels of awareness and of different strategies in dealing with ambivalences. Practical interests may lie in the evaluation of therapeutic interventions that strive to heighten the awareness of ambivalences and to establish specific ways of dealing with them.

4.4. *Ambivalences at Turning Points and Transitions*

The notion of turning points refers to phenomena, experiences and actions where the awareness of ambivalences may be especially promising and where the interplay between generations and the life course is quite pertinent. A turning point may be understood, metaphorically speaking, as an interruption in a person's development. It coincides with the necessity, or at least the possibility, to reflect upon personal relationships and the commitments they involve. Changes may be requested and importance attributed to particular relationships, or persons may be asked to restructure their relationships. New commitments and obligations may emerge that compete with

ongoing concerns and ties. In reality, "turning points" may extend a certain period of orientation and search, hence it is also appropriate to speak of transitions. They can be seen as fields of action entailing an accentuated experience of ambivalences.

Perhaps the most obvious turning point at the intersection between intergenerational relationships, the life course and the social context is the transition to parenthood. This appears in many ways and, not surprisingly, there is still no comprehensive theory of generative behavior and decision-making. Several attempts, however, refer to the notion of ambivalence, mostly using the word in an everyday meaning. More elaborate studies along this line point out that decisions are reached only through a lengthy process that takes the form of oscillations typical of ambivalences. A good illustration is the phenomenon of late first motherhood (see Engstler & Lüscher, 1991).

The experience of ambivalences (as defined above) is bound to the self and personal identity. In addition to their search for the subjective meaning of motherhood, many women are confronted with or exposed to normative expectations, traditional or progressive, by others who are close to them, and also by society at large, as represented by subcultures such as religions and ethnic groups, not to speak of economic pressures and the contemporary organization of the labor market. This topic also illustrates what is referred to above as the experience of ambivalence "in the dialogue with generalized others."

An attempt to draw upon the concept of ambivalence and to further explore its relevance for a typological differentiation of generative behaviors is offered as part of in an analysis of the Swiss Family Survey (Le Goff, Sauvain-Dugerdil, Rossier, & Coenen-Huther, 2005). Ambivalence is used as an alternative to the notion of rational choice in discussing fertility behavior in low-fertility countries like Switzerland. It serves as a key concept to distinguish between four main types of the fertility project: The familialist subculture, either sequential or simultaneous articulation between labor market participation and motherhood, and childlessness. Future trends are discussed in the light of the pressure to change exerted by those women who experience a high degree of ambivalence between their own life aspirations and normative expectations, while also possessing high levels of personal resources.

With regard to motherhood as such, a treatise by Parker, with the suggestive title "Mother Love, Mother Hate," written from a psychoanalytical perspective, merits special attention. Parker (1995, p. 6) refers to Melanie Klein, who "considered that ambivalence had a positive part to play in

mental life as a safeguard against hate." Parker adds: "I want to go further and claim a specifically creative role for manageable maternal ambivalence. I suggest that it is in the very anguish of maternal ambivalence itself that a fruitfulness for mothers and children resides." The major mechanism can be described as follows: Given the fundamental dichotomy and the awareness of love and hate, mothers are able even in desperate situations to reactivate the forces of love. More generally, mothers search continuously, even under difficult situations, for arrangements that serve the well-being of their children. This fundamental ability to cope with ambivalence creatively can be seen as a genuine cultural and social contribution of mothers to civilization. Contributions like Parker's make clear why – and also how – a focus on ambivalence can be compatible with feminist thinking. This field is sensitized to possible ambivalences in gender relations and to constructive, as well as destructive, strategies for dealing with them.

Referring to a later phase in the life course, Pillemer and Suitor (2002) focus on the tension between autonomy and dependence and find that a key dilemma leading to intergenerational ambivalence is the conflict between the norm of solidarity with children and the normative expectation that children will develop independent lives in the case of the so-called "off-time transitions" here in the lives of children. As a general finding, the authors showed, "that adult children's failure to achieve and maintain normative adult statuses and financial independence, and mothers' developmental stage predict ambivalent assessments of the relationship. Regression analyses supported these hypotheses and also revealed that the variables predicting ambivalence differed from those that predicted closeness and interpersonal stress" (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002, p. 602). In particular, heightened ambivalence can be anticipated when adult children have not attained (or maintained) adult statuses. When parents face such unexpected circumstances, they are likely to experience mixed emotions involving a desire to protect and assist the child, as well as disappointment at the child's situation and self-doubt regarding parenting. This study, like the one mentioned before, makes explicit use of the concept of ambivalence. It is not difficult to imagine other turning points that display preconditions for the experience of ambivalences, such as occupational choice, or – at the end of a professional career – the period of retirement. Work in these areas would require – and could stimulate – further efforts in the conceptualization of ambivalence.

The example suggests viewing non-normative (or even deviant) behavior as a cause of ambivalence. From a theoretical point of view, there may be a linkage with the analysis of stigma, such as that of Goffman (1963). Interestingly enough, although the latter does not use the term ambivalence,

he describes behaviors that can be interpreted as strategies for coping with ambivalences.

If attention is directed toward specific features of the life course, trauma is certainly an experience that can generate ambivalences in several ways. Under the impact of personal and structural violence, the self is threatened, and this may remain so for a long time, or even lifelong. Thus, the traumatic experience becomes part of the personality. On one hand, it is so subjective that it cannot be shared with others, but on the other hand there may be a strong desire to share one's experiences, not least of all in the hope of receiving therapeutic support. This holds true for personal traumatic experiences such as child abuse. Traumas can also be collective, as in the case of wars. The Holocaust is a unique case of the experience of collective trauma for which an extensive body of literature exists (see for example Ludewig-Kedmi, 2001, 2004). The twofold experience of ambivalence in connection with personal and collective trauma is concisely summarized by Smelser (2004, p. 53) in the following passage:

One of the peculiarities that have been noticed in connection with acute psychological traumas is a very strong dual tendency: to avoid and to relive... At the ideational level one main defense is some form of amnesia (numbing, emotional paralysis)... actual forgetting, denial, difficulty in recalling, or unwillingness to contemplate or dwell on the traumatic event. At the same time, the trauma has a way of intruding itself into the mind, in the form of unwanted thoughts, nightmares and flashbacks. These apparently antagonistic tendencies have presented themselves to some as a paradox... At the behavioral level, the same double tendency has been observed: A compulsive tendency to avoid situations that resemble the traumatic scene or remind the victim of it, but at the same time an equally strong compulsion to repeat the trauma or to relive some aspect of it... When seeking an analogy at the socio-cultural level, we discover such dual tendencies – mass forgetting and collective campaigns on the part of groups to downplay or 'put behind us', if not actually to deny a cultural trauma on the one hand, and a compulsive preoccupation with the event, as well as group efforts to keep it in the public consciousness as a reminder that 'we must remember', or 'lest we forget', on the other. A memorial to an event... has both reactions... [we can speak of] the compulsion to remember and the compulsion to forget.

4.5. Ambivalences Concerning Specific Fields of Action

4.5.1. Caring

The experience of ambivalences may be greater in tasks where tensions and contradictions cumulate. This is certainly the case in caring. For caregivers, and in reference to the subjective component of relationships, sympathy and antipathy are at play, and many caring activities include intimate behaviors