

## 7. INTERGENERATIONAL AMBIVALENCE: METHODS, MEASURES, AND RESULTS OF THE KONSTANZ STUDY

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### INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on methods and results of an exploratory research project on intergenerational ambivalence between parents and their adult children. The study was conducted in 1998 and 1999 at the research center for "Society and Family" at the University of Konstanz. Its conceptual framework consists of the theoretical considerations and the schematic model touched upon in Chap. 2 of this book (see pp. 23–62) as one attempt to operationalize the concept of intergenerational ambivalence.

As a matter of record, we may state briefly that we realized the relevance and fruitfulness of the concept of ambivalence for the study of intergenerational relationships as three perspectives converged for us. These three are: (1) the general study of intergenerational relationships in postmodern societies (see Lüscher, 1995, brief English summary Lüscher, 2000); (2) the critical review of the status of research in Europe and the United States (Lüscher & Pillemer, 1996, 1997, 1998); and (3) our project on how parent-child relationships are reorganized after divorce in later phases of marriage, combined with a sub-study of the effects of the divorce of an adult son (Lüscher & Pajung-Bilger, 1998, brief English summary Lüscher, 2000).

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In the latter we explored, through a series of semi-structured interviews, how fathers and mothers on one side, and adult children on the other, coped with this event as a turning point in their lives. Our original intention was to distinguish different degrees of closeness and distance in connection with different degrees and forms of solidarity. In the course of the analysis, it became obvious that the complexity of these relationships could not be captured and explained by paying attention to solidarity alone. The obvious contradictions in the reports about the relationships suggested that we had to come up with a concept that would be more appropriate to the obvious tensions in these relationships, and to the oscillations between closeness and distance, as well as between conservation and change, that were common in them. In this context, the idea of ambivalence opened the door for a new approach.

In a secondary analysis of the interviews with the concept of ambivalence at our disposal, it became possible to offer a set of useful interpretations. These results encouraged attempts to apply the concept in a study which was especially designed around ambivalence, referring to an explicit definition, and based above all on an operationalization that would meet the requirements of quantitative research. In other words, in the first study on divorce we used ambivalence as an "interpretative concept" (see Chap. 2); in the Konstanz project, we used it as a "research construct."

As this study is one of the first to apply the concept of ambivalence in a multifaceted way in quantitative sociological research, we will comment upon its research instruments in some detail. Before looking at them, however, we will briefly review the study's basic assumptions and hypotheses.

We carefully recruited our respondents, consisting of both parents and adult children. To arrive at a sample that can be seen as approximately representative of the population in Konstanz, we had to conform strictly to strong legislation concerning the protection of personal data in Germany. For our particular study, after examining the purpose of the project and seeing its strictly academic orientation, the authorities gave us the opportunity to draw a first sample of people between the ages of 25 and 70 for a telephone survey. This survey provided the base for subsequent in-person, face-to-face interviews with a smaller number of people whom we assessed as willing and well suited to participate.

In keeping with the interpretative strategy of "uncovering ambivalence," we will present and discuss the results in a series of steps. We start with data pertaining to direct conscious experience of ambivalence and then present the results of our attempts to assess ambivalence indirectly. This approach allows us to apply the distinction between the personal and institutional dimensions of the experience of ambivalence, as deduced from the analysis of the concept of relationships (see Chap. 2). To that end, we use data that refer to specific dyads such as mother-son or daughter-father. We also will look at a third set of results having to do with patterns and strategies of dealing with ambivalence. This third set of results can

be seen as suggesting another possible application for the schematic model as it is presented and explained in Chap. 2 of this volume.

Validation of the instruments is an important issue. Since many of the well-established procedures for assessing social relationships quantitatively are not appropriate for capturing the specifics of ambivalence (see Lettke & Klein, Chap. 4 of this volume), we felt it necessary to develop new ones. The validity of these instruments can be evaluated only after they have been used in future research. In the meantime, we approach this issue of validity by testing the coherence between different sets of questions.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENTS

### *Introductory Remarks*

The conceptual frame of reference suggests a certain number of consequences for the design of research instruments. They can be summarized as follows: First, the experience of ambivalence is one aspect of intergenerational relationships, but ambivalence must not be present in all relationships between parents and adult children. Ambivalence appears in different forms and with different levels of intensity. Second, people can be aware of ambivalence in intergenerational relations in daily conduct, and they can speak about them in everyday language. Hence, it is appropriate to use questions that directly address such experiences and the awareness of them. Furthermore, questions may be asked about whether the experience of ambivalence is seen as a burden or a challenge; in other words, questions can be asked regarding the judgment of ambivalence. Third, ambivalence may be hidden and unconscious. It can be concealed in how relationships are perceived and in how they are described. Thus, we need questions that allow the assessment of relationship by different, opposing and contradicting attributes and from different angles. Fourth, the elaborated definition of ambivalence (see Chap. 2) approaches ambivalence as multi-dimensional and complex. We must therefore pay attention, in the elaboration of instruments as well as in their validation, to this complexity. Fifth, ambivalence has to be coped with or dealt with. It seems plausible to distinguish different modes and strategies for doing so. The Konstanz-model is an attempt to deduce such strategies from theoretical assumptions and propositions.

### *Sampling*

As mentioned above, the study began with a telephone survey. The main purpose of that survey was to gather data about the population between 25 and 70 years of

age in the Konstanz county, in order to draw a sample of persons to be included in the main study. This initial step was necessary because no data were available on women and men in these age groups, nor was it possible to use a representative sample from other studies or to use the information from official registers. Only the names of people in this age group could be obtained, and that information could be obtained only by special permission. From a total of 162,953 persons, we drew a random sample consisting of 1,682 addresses. Of those, 528 agreed to participate in the telephone survey. The "exhaustiveness quota" after eliminating sampling neutral exceptions was 62.9%. The survey, carried out in 1998 in cooperation with ZUMA (Survey Center Mannheim, supported by the German Science Foundation) is documented in a methods report (ZUMA-Technischer Bericht Nr. 98/13 – available from the authors).

These interviews had the goal of collecting basic demographic data, information on the structure and size of the family and marital status. We also included a preliminary question about the everyday experience of ambivalence. In the responses to even these simple questions, we noticed a comparatively widespread experience and awareness of intergenerational ambivalence. Seven percent of the fathers and mothers said that they often were torn back and forth in regard to their oldest child. In turn, 18% of the children said that they felt torn back and forth. About 32% of the parents and 20% of the children said that they never felt torn back and forth. There were also preliminary findings that showed gender differences in the experience of personal ambivalence. Women reported such experiences more often than men did. Neither parents nor children judged the experience of ambivalence in a solely negative way, and there was a relatively high consciousness of thinking about the awareness of ambivalence in an everyday sense.

Of the 528 respondents of the 1998 study, we selected 90 people according to three criteria:

- (1) They should be either adult children with living parents or parents of living adult children, which would increase our chances of doing follow-up interviews with members of the other generation.
- (2) Assuming that the experience and the awareness of ambivalence may be related to education, we selected people with either high or low levels of education.
- (3) In order to compare families with many or few experiences of ambivalence, we also included respondents who reported, in the telephone survey, either high or low intensity levels of ambivalence.

After initial interviews with these 90 people, we subsequently interviewed – as far as possible – their parents (when respondent belonged to the adult-child generation) or their adult children (when the respondent belonged to the parent generation). The resulting database of the 1999 study consisted of 52 interviews with adult children

*Table 1.* Age of Interviewed Family Members.

Age Class	Father	Mother	Son	Daughter	N row	(% Row)
25–29	–	–	3	4	7	(5.6)
30–34	–	–	4	7	11	(8.9)
35–39	–	–	10	6	16	(12.9)
40–44	–	–	5	5	10	(8.1)
45–49	–	3	3	1	7	(5.6)
50–54	4	4	2	1	11	(8.9)
55–59	6	8	–	–	14	(11.3)
60–64	16	8	1	–	25	(20.2)
65 and older	9	14	–	–	23	(18.5)
N column	35	37	28	24	124	(100)
(% Column)	(28.2)	(29.8)	(22.6)	(19.4)	(100)	

Source: Study 1999; N = 124 persons.

and 72 interviews with parents. In these 124 interviews, respondents referred to 255 dyadic relationships. (For more information, see the working paper of Lüscher, Pajung-Bilger, Lettke & Böhmer, 2000.)

The distribution of family status, age, and sex of all subjects appears in Table 1.

#### *Research Instruments*

In accordance with the interpretative strategy of "uncovering" (see Chap. 2), the core instruments of the survey were of three kinds:

- (1) an instrument addressing the overt experience and awareness of ambivalence,
- (2) one addressing the assessment of relationships in regard to covert ambivalence, and
- (3) one addressing how ambivalence is managed and dealt with.

The topic of ambivalence itself was also addressed in some miscellaneous questions. These included a request to evaluate the interview's comprehensibility with regard to the topic of ambivalence. In addition, the questionnaire included the following topics: judgments of how younger and older people see each other, their mutual understanding of society and views of the family, and standard questions concerning personal and socio-demographic data. The following overview provides the major elements of the questionnaire (see Table 2 numbers: sequence of questions).

We developed two versions of the questionnaire, a "parents' version" and a "children's version." The contents of the questions and the sequence are identical. (For a full documentation of the instruments in German and English, see

**Table 2.** Overview. Major Elements of the Questionnaire of the Konstanz Study.

Level of Observation	Instruments					
	Awareness	Assessment	Management	Society	Family Image	Miscellaneous Questions
Intergenerational relationships in general				1 relationship between young and old 2 changes in this relationship 3/4 perceptions of young and old generation 5 relationship between young and old	8 morphological aspects of family 9 gender-related task distribution in the family	6 tolerance for ambiguity 49 quality of questionnaire 50 difficulties in answering 51 rating of ambivalence
Relationships in the family	15 orientation at tried and true ways vs. new ways 16 orientation at family harmony vs. allow conflicts	7 taboos in family conversation 13 how family members relate to one another	12 generalized maxims for action 14 handling of ambivalent situations		10 contrast: ideal vs. real family life 11 reasons for discrepancies	52 concern about ambivalence 53-61 demography
Specifics about parent-child relationships	18 frequency of ambivalence, feeling torn 19 judgement of ambivalence, stress	17 relationship quality (graphical illustration) 24 closeness of relationship	34-41 vignette "financial support" 42-48 vignette "choice of partner"			62 potential interview-partners in the family 63 admission for future contacts
	20 typical situation of ambivalence 21 agreement with ambivalence 22 orientation at tried and true ways vs. new ways 23 orientation at family harmony vs. allow conflicts	25 contrast: ideal vs. real relationship 26 un-/pleasant aspects of relationship 27 indirectly measured ambivalence (attributes) 28 frequency of contact 29/30 desired contact 31 changes of the relationship in the past 5 years 32 reasons for this changes 33 expected future changes				

Lüscher, Pajung-Bilger, Lettke, Böhmer, Rasner & Pillemer, 2000; <http://www.uni-konstanz.de/FuF/SozWiss/fg-soz/ag-fam/famsoz-i.html>) A brief summary of our methods appears in the Appendix to this chapter.

Because of the exploratory character of the study, it was not yet possible to assess the validity and the reliability of the instruments by way of comparison with other studies, except for some measures, which have been used in the Ithaca study (see Pillemer, Chap. 5 of this volume). Instead, as mentioned earlier, we attempted to look at the coherence between different sets of questions within the interview. The results, which seem quite satisfactory at this point of development, are reported below.

The data we present refer mainly to descriptive statements and judgments about dyads such as father-daughter or son-mother. Our use of such statements follows from grounding our research in a conceptualization of ambivalence that has its focus in relationships rather than individual persons. Continuing our strategy of "uncovering," as mentioned above, we start with data on the awareness of direct ambivalence as expressed in everyday speech. Then we include indicators of indirect ambivalence that we assessed by indirect measures. We then present the data on the perspective of family roles, followed by a detailed comparison of the dyadic relationships. We conclude with the results relevant to the correlation between ambivalence and the quality of relationships, and strategies of dealing with ambivalence.

As outlined in our description of the research instruments above, our approach is exploratory in a twofold sense. First, we rely on a broad conceptualization of ambivalence, for which the distinction between two dimensions, the personal and the institutional, is especially relevant. We do not limit the scope of ambivalence to feelings, and we try to bring in the theoretically deduced typology of four patterns of dealing with ambivalence. Second, we try to develop new instruments, which bears certain risks. In this regard, our data and their presentation differ from other research reports in this volume.

From a critical point of view, one may reproach the study for being neither a survey based on a large sample, using a specific set of more or less established instruments, nor a clinical study focusing with in-depth instruments on a few cases. We are willing to defend the resulting hybrid character (as it may be called) of the study, however, in light of its sensitivity to the broadness of the concept of ambivalence.

## RESULTS

### *Ambivalence as an Everyday Experience*

Our general hypothesis implies that the experience of ambivalence is an almost commonplace experience. Thus, we expect that parents and adult children quite

**Table 3.** Frequency of Ambivalence (%).

Very often	4
Often	11
Now and then	29
Seldom	35
Never	20

*Source:* Study 1999; *N* = 255 dyads.

often feel pulled in two directions to the extent of feeling torn, and we also expect that they are aware of these persistent tensions. The data from the preliminary telephone survey as well as the responses to different questions about the conscious experience of ambivalence confirm this assumption. Being asked to what extent they feel torn, respondents in only 20% of the dyads say that they never feel torn (Table 3).

Six contradictorily formulated statements about relationships in six different statements provide additional confirmation of the correctness of our expectation that the experience of ambivalence is common. Consider, for instance, the following statement: "[Person] and I often get on each other's nerves, but nevertheless we feel very close and like each other very much." Twenty-four percent of our respondents agreed with this statement of ambivalent emotions. Other examples are: "My relationship with my [person] is very intimate, but that also makes it restrictive," with which 11.6% agreed, and "Although I love my [person] very much, I am also sometimes indifferent toward him/her" with which 13.4% agreed. Summing the responses to all these questions, we find on the average 36% agreement with the contradictory statements (Table 4).

Although this multi-item Likert scale is only a rough indicator for the experience of ambivalence and only partly reflects the reported feeling of being torn, it nevertheless shows the presence of ambivalence in the assessments of relationships. Compared with Table 3, which entails a general judgment, the underlying reference here is to different contexts.

**Table 4.** Agreement with Ambivalence. Average sum of Contradictory Statements about Relationships (%).

Agree	36
Partly agree	20
Do not agree	44

*Source:* Study 1999; *N* = 228 dyads.

*Ambivalence and Family Roles*

We collected data from mothers and fathers as well as from daughters and sons, which allows us also to compare the frequency of ambivalent experiences with respect to family roles. In the existing literature of intergenerational relations, the "generational stake" hypothesis is widely cited (see, for instance, Giarrusso, Stallings & Bengtson, 1995). The hypothesis holds, generally speaking, that parents have a more positive, less critical view of their relationships with adult children than the reverse. Parents also tend to see themselves as closer to their children than their children see themselves as being toward the parents. What could we expect with respect to ambivalence in these situations? If ambivalence bears a strong negative connotation, we would expect parents to report less ambivalence than children. And what about gender? Does the well-known fact that women (especially mothers) are the "kin-keepers" suggest a lower intensity of ambivalence from females?

The findings give a more differentiated and somewhat contradictory picture, as Table 5 shows.

Two overall indicators of ambivalence – namely, the concern about ambivalence, and the frequency of consciously experienced overt ambivalence (in the sense of feeling torn) – show no significant differences between parents and children or between gender. However, the differing answers given by sons attract attention. This finding reinforces the conclusion that ambivalence should not be evaluated in solely negative terms. It is in agreement with the general conceptualization of ambivalence deduced from the history of the concept and its usage in different disciplines (see Chap. 2). However, as will be shown below, the issue is rather complicated, and further explorations are needed to get to understand it.

If ambivalence is measured in an indirect way, and if we distinguish between the subjective-personal and the institutional-structural dimensions, we are able to uncover noteworthy differences. Although the differences are not significant in regard to the *personal* dimension, the picture changes when one looks at *institutional* ambivalence. Here, the distribution shows a significant degree of differentiation. A close look suggests that this result is due mostly to a lower degree of intensity calculated from the responses of the parents, and furthermore from a higher degree of intensity in the reports of sons as compared with those of the daughters. Although a certain reticence is recommended given the comparatively small size of the sample, these results demonstrate the usefulness of the distinction between the personal and the institutional dimensions of relationships in regard to ambivalence.

Our data on the evaluation of intergenerational ambivalence provide still another interesting result of exploring ambivalence with reference to the differences

**Table 5.** Ambivalence Indicators and Family Roles. (Column Percent of Each Indicator).

Indicators of Ambivalence	Family Role				$\chi^2$	P
	Father	Mother	Son	Daughter		
(a) Concern about ambivalence						
Very often/often thought about	40	37	36	50	8.118	0.230
Now and then thought about	32	37	50	29		
Seldom/never thought about	28	26	14	21		
(b) Frequency of ambivalence						
Very often/often torn in two directions	13	12	12	31	12.307	0.055
Now and then torn in two directions	31	33	25	21		
Seldom/never torn in two directions	56	55	64	48		
(c) Intensity of indirectly measured personal ambivalence <sup>a</sup>						
-1 (low)	32	43	37	57	21.436	0.258
0	3	1	2	2		
1	26	25	33	13		
2	25	25	12	13		
3	12	5	15	15		
4	1	1	2	0		
5 (high)	1	0	0	0		
(d) Intensity of indirectly measured institutional ambivalence <sup>a</sup>						
-1 (low)	28	26	10	21	36.771	0.001
0	3	7	4	13		
1	31	34	12	23		
2	31	26	50	32		
3	6	7	25	11		
4 (high)	2	0	0	0		
(e) Rating of ambivalence						
Very/more positive than negative	56	36	37	29	23.574	0.001
Equally positive and negative	37	61	51	46		
More negative than positive/very	7	4	12	25		
(f) Judgement of ambivalence						
Very stressful/stressful	53	59	34	62	8.227	0.042
Only a little/not stressful at all	47	41	66	39		

Source: Study 1999; N = 255 dyads.

<sup>a</sup>To calculate the ambivalence values the formula developed by Griffin is employed (see Thompson et al., 1995, p. 369f.).

between family roles. First of all, parts "e" and "f" both show that ambivalence is not limited to solely negative connotations. The majority of responses to the more general question about rating (see part e) is in the middle-category of "equally positive and negative." There is, however, one notable exception of fathers who judge ambivalence predominantly as more positive (56%), and another, in the opposite direction, of daughters of whom only 29% judge ambivalence more positive than negative. These two judgments contribute mainly to the significant difference among the incumbents of the family positions.

The stronger evaluation of ambivalence as being either stressful or not also suggests a certain shift. Slightly more than half of the respondents (again with the exception of the sons) judge ambivalence as being a source of stress, although a considerable number of them do not see it in this way. This result seems even more noteworthy if one takes into account that a negative undertone does seem to characterize the common everyday understanding of ambivalence.

#### *Dyadic Relationships*

A further degree of differentiation becomes available through analysis of the eight dyadic relationships: father or mother each in relation to their daughter or son, and vice versa, as shown in Table 6.

These results confirm that overt ambivalence (in the sense of feeling torn) is frequent in the range of 32–54% of the dyads. Although the overall differences are not significant, patterns can be uncovered if both generational status and gender are taken into consideration. Adult sons and (on a slightly higher level) adult daughters report almost the same frequency of ambivalence to the father. Conversely, fathers report ambivalence in the same frequency in the relationships to daughters and sons. In contrast, the relationships between adult children and mothers, both in regard to

**Table 6.** Frequency of Ambivalence: "Frequently Torn"  
(% Related to Single Dyads).

Respondent	Person Referred to			
	Father	Mother	Son	Daughter
Father	–	–	41	48
Mother	–	–	51	39
Son	42	32	–	–
Daughter	50	54	–	–

Source: Study 1999;  $N = 254$  dyads;  $r = 0.693$ .

frequency and reciprocity, are more differentiated. This finding is compatible with the general insight that mothers play a *stronger, and apparently more outspoken role* in kin-relations. More than half of the daughters report frequent feelings of being torn, considerably more than the percentage of mothers who report ambivalences with the daughters. In contrast, for son-mother dyads as compared with mother-son dyads, the pattern is quite different. All in all, opposite-sex ambivalence seems to occur more often from the perspectives of parents, whereas same-sex ambivalence seems to be more frequent from the perspectives of adult children.

For a next step of uncovering, we can differentiate these patterns by the personal and the institutional dimension of ambivalence. This requires that we take indirect measures into account and refer to the conceptual model of intergenerational ambivalence. For this purpose, we developed an indicator for inferred ambivalence based in a list of attributes that describe the relationship. We associate attributes such as "warm" or "loving" with the "convergence" pole. Attributes such as "indifferent" or "superficial" represent the "divergence" pole. "Predictable" or "inflexible" stand for "reproduction"; and "open to new experiences" or "full of variety" are examples of "innovation."

Respondents rated the applicability of each attribute on a 5-point Likert scale. Factor analysis helped in finding suitable attributes for constructing the respective scale. Each scale shows the same 5-point rating of applicability and therefore displays information about the average applicability of the four poles. When opposite poles apply at the same time, we consider this as an indicator of ambivalence. Thus, simultaneous applicability of "convergence" and "divergence" indicates "personal ambivalence." The combination of "reproduction" and "innovation" indicates "institutional ambivalence." (See appendix for a full presentation of these calculations, see Lettke, 2000a, 2002.)

Calculations show that, on average, respondents experience institutional ambivalences more frequently (47%) than personal ambivalences (31%) (table not shown). This is a first indicator for the fruitfulness of this distinction, which is confirmed by a comparison of parts a and b of Table 7. These two sections show our data on the two dimensions we are looking at, split into dyads where – with a few exceptions – the level of institutional ambivalence is higher than that of personal ambivalence.

This finding can be interpreted as an indicator that the tensions between closeness and distance are seen to be of lower frequency than those between "reproduction" and "innovation"; in other words, the tensions regarding the modes of organizing the family are higher. Moreover, it seems plausible, as the data in Table 7b show, that the younger generation feels more ambivalent than do their parents. Here, we are reminded of the thesis of "generational stake." However, the results from this study add an important additional characterization to this thesis by locating the

**Table 7.** Inferred Personal and Institutional Ambivalence (% Related to Dyads).

Respondent	Person Referred to			
	Father	Mother	Son	Daughter
<b>(a) Personal ambivalence<sup>a</sup></b>				
Father	--	--	45	36
Mother	--	--	36	23
Son	44	18	--	--
Daughter	32	22	--	--
<b>(b) Institutional ambivalence<sup>b</sup></b>				
Father	--	--	43	37
Mother	--	--	41	30
Son	74	84	--	--
Daughter	60	44	--	--

<sup>a</sup>Study 1999;  $N = 237$  dyads;  $r = 0.201$ ; contingency coefficient = 0.199.

<sup>b</sup>Study 1999;  $N = 237$  dyads;  $r = 0.000$ ; contingency coefficient = 0.325.

difference between the young and the old in the realm of structural-institutional arrangements.

The data suggest that exploring further differentiations will be fruitful. On the personal dimension, mothers and daughters both report low levels of ambivalence in their relationships. The ratings in father-son dyads are higher. This result is compatible with the conventional "wisdom" that relationships between mother and daughters are often close, especially if the latter are mothers themselves or intend to become mothers.

In contrast, the son-mother dyad stands out, especially in regard to differences between the perspectives of sons and mothers, and the difference between the personal and the institutional dimensions. Whereas mothers report more ambivalences than sons do on the personal dimension, the opposite is the case on the institutional dimension. How can these discrepancies be explained?

We may hypothesize that, when asked directly about the feeling of being torn, respondents immediately associate this feeling with the personal aspects of their relationships, that is, with the overall sentiment of closeness vs. distance. As has been shown, personal ambivalence is least frequent in the perspective of the sons in son-mother dyads. Another explanation points to latent ambivalences. This indicator is used when respondents state that they "seldom" or "never" feel torn, even though we are able to identify ambivalences by indirect measurement. With regard to the personal dimension, we find on the average of all dyads 13.9% latent ambivalences. In the institutional dimension, the level is nearly twice as high: 24.7% (no tables given).

**Table 8.** Attributed Latent Ambivalence (% Related to Dyads).

Respondent	Person Referred to			
	Father	Mother	Son	Daughter
<b>(a) Latent personal ambivalence<sup>a</sup></b>				
Father	--	--	23	11
Mother	--	--	17	10
Son	22	11	--	--
Daughter	14	0	--	--
<b>(b) Latent institutional ambivalence<sup>b</sup></b>				
Father	--	--	18	15
Mother	--	--	18	10
Son	44	56	--	--
Daughter	30	22	--	--

<sup>a</sup>Study 1999;  $N = 237$  dyads;  $r = 0.497$ ; contingency coefficient = 0.281.

<sup>b</sup>Study 1999;  $N = 227$  dyads;  $r = 0.007$ ; contingency coefficient = 0.388.

Keeping in mind the lower degree of inferred personal ambivalence (see above), we suggest that these aspects of a relationship are more clear-cut. In other words, the chances for latent personal ambivalence to remain covert or unnoticed are rather low. A potential for personal ambivalence will give it a predominant status in relationships, so that family members feel an urgent need to deal with the situation. These aspects of the relationship are so central that they require action by the subjects.

The analysis shows almost no evidence of latent or covert personal ambivalence. In contrast to this finding, latent institutional ambivalence varies with respect to different parent-child relationships (see Table 8). Interestingly enough, latent ambivalences are here more common among children with regard to their parents than vice versa. The most striking result confirms our assumption that latent institutional ambivalence can be ascribed especially to son-mother relationships (56%) – a finding which merits more attention in future research.

#### *Dealing with Ambivalences*

The foregoing results confirm the existence of overt and covert expressions of ambivalence. The differences between parents and adult children and between genders are indicators of a multi-faceted picture of intergenerational relations which is also valid for the evaluation of ambivalence as such. Two further questions arise: What kind of correlations can be found with information on the quality of



**Table 9.** Ambivalence and Quality of Relationship (%).

	Quality of Relationship		
	Good	Fair	Poor
Often	29	73	72
Seldom	71	27	28

Source: Study 1999;  $N = 120$  persons;  $r = 0.000$ ; Spearman =  $-0.419$ .

relationships, and what kind of strategies do the respondents apply in order to deal with ambivalence?

The first of these two aspects is the subject of other studies (see, for example, Pillemer, Chap. 5 of this volume). The overall impression shows that higher frequencies of reported ambivalence go together with judgments about poorer quality of relationship. In one way, our results are in line with these findings, as shown by Table 9.

Because ambivalences may cause poor relationships, however, and because poor relationships may lead to feelings of being torn, it is difficult to determine the direction of causality in these situations. According to binary logistic regressions, the quality of a relationship is more likely to be regarded as an independent variable, and its effect is stronger for parents than for children. In addition, quality of relationship is also seen as a dependent variable. Further investigation should concentrate on the relation between these two causes. Are they linked with different kinds of relationships or families, or can we imagine combining temporal structures? One could imagine that latent ambivalences cause poor relationships and these relationships could result in manifest ambivalences that deteriorate the relationship even more. This thought points to the importance of seeing relationships in terms of their dynamic qualities. In this regard, Lettke (2000b) draws attention to the formative power of socialization for parent-child relationships throughout life. Lang (Chap. 8, this volume) concentrates on the quality of relationships in later phases of parent-child relationships and on the impact of "filial maturity." To clarify this issue, longitudinal data will be needed.

The same is true with respect to strategies people use to deal with ambivalence. The Konstanz model, as outlined in Chap. 2, shows a distinction of four basic types and uses two basic instruments to get information about this issue. The first instrument is developed around the question of how families handle ambivalent situations in general. The second instrument consists of two vignettes, namely the request for money and the choice of a partner/spouse as noted above. Answers could be given to statements that attempted to express maxims characteristic of the four strategies, namely: to preserve consensually ("solidarity"), to mature

**Table 10.** Strategies for Dealing with Ambivalences in Different Questions (%).

Management Questions	Strategies				N = Persons
	Solidarity	Emancipation	Atomization	Captivation	
1. How family members handle ambivalent situations	26	57	13	5	120
2. Reactions in case of requested financial support by children	54	28	10	7	116
3. Reactions to children's choice of a partner	65	25	3	8	110

Source: Study 1999.

reciprocally ("emancipation"), to separate conflictually ("atomization"), and to conserve reluctantly ("captivation").

Table 10 lays out the distribution of the answers. It shows, first, that two strategies dominate, namely solidarity and emancipation. This is plausible and understandable if we consider, first, that the interviewees were asked to respond to overt statements. We also cannot exclude the possibility that they are adapting their answers to what they perceive as a certain social desirability. Indeed, one may criticize the typology for not being neutral in regard of all four types. Nevertheless, we do acknowledge the existence of strategies that seem less favorable. Furthermore, the findings show a clear difference between the general statements and the answers to specific situations as described by the vignettes.

The strategies of solidarity and emancipation differ in the weight given to the poles of reproduction and innovation, whereas the two instruments differ in concrete situations. The findings suggest, therefore, that concreteness lowers the acceptance of or readiness for innovative conduct. Concomitantly, one may argue that both vignettes appeal to loyalty, which involves a stronger will to keep the family together, and therefore "solidarity" overbalances "emancipation." From a methodological point of view, the question is always open as to how close vignettes are to the real experiences of the respondents. Therefore, further research may include the development of alternative instruments.

#### Correlations Between Ambivalence Indicators

We conclude this presentation of the data with a matrix that summarizes correlations among the different measures of ambivalence used in this exploratory study.

This overview can also be interpreted as a tentative validation of the instruments (Table 11).

The major results can be summarized as follows:

- The frequency of being torn appears as a valid operationalization of ambivalence, as it has highly significant correlations with almost all other indicators: Respondents who report feeling torn judge these ambivalences as stressful, rate them negatively, and often are concerned about them. These respondents are most explicit about the ways they deal with ambivalence. (A closer look reveals that they often refer to the modes of captivation and atomization.) Furthermore, overtly reported frequent ambivalence correlates significantly with measures of indirect or covert ambivalence. Finally, these respondents accept conflict in their relationships.
- Significant correlations between judging ambivalence as stressful and the other indicators of ambivalence occur less often. This finding is consistent with the observation, mentioned above, that the existence of ambivalence as part of daily experience seems to be accepted. The frequency of experienced ambivalence is what makes it stressful and leads to a negative rating of ambivalence.
- The correlations with measures of the rating of ambivalence confirm and differentiate this finding. The comparatively high correlation with different modes of dealing with ambivalence (see above) is confirmed.
- "Dealing with ambivalence," differentiated according the four strategies, proves to be a central variable related to almost all the other indicators. This finding confirms the usefulness of attending not only to the existence of (overt and covert) ambivalence, but also to the pragmatic, action-related aspects of ambivalence, namely, how people cope with it. For the two major variables "frequency of ambivalence" and "dealing with ambivalence," distinguishing between the personal and the institutional dimensions of relationships seems to be fruitful. But the two dimensions also interact with each other. This finding suggests further efforts to develop instruments that will bear light on how these two dimensions are both independent and interdependent.

Our findings confirm that the concept of intergenerational ambivalence refers to a multi-layered phenomenon. The breadth of our approach and the instruments we used allowed us to identify some major dimensions. That this list can be expanded is shown in other research contributions to this volume. The strategy of "uncovering" seems appropriate, although the linkage of direct and indirect measurement needs further exploration. Contrary to the method (advocated in psychological literature) of using the direct measurement of ambivalence as a validity criterion for indirectly identified ambivalence and thereby classing it with the same phenomenon (see

Table 11. Intercorrelations of Different Indicators for Ambivalence (Spearman/Contingency Coefficient).

Variable 1	Variable 2									
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1. Frequency of ambivalence: (very often ... never torn)	0.390***	-0.240***	0.336***	0.089	0.358***	-0.264***	-0.276***	0.015	-0.238***	
2. Judgment of ambivalence: (very ... not stressful at all)	1.000	-0.221***	0.320***	-0.072	0.233	0.078	0.084	0.010	0.060	
3. Rating of ambivalence: (very positive ... very negative)	-	1.000	-0.144**	0.004	0.348***	0.102	0.196***	-0.146**	0.068	
4. Concern about ambivalence: (very often ... never thought about)	-	-	1.000	-0.009	0.289***	-0.098	-0.070	0.042	-0.192***	
5. Agreement with ambivalence: (consent with contradictory descriptions of relationships; highly agree ... do not agree at all)	-	-	-	1.000	0.255*	0.073	-0.140**	-0.126*	-0.019	
6. Dealing with ambivalence: (emancipation, atomization, captivation, solidarity) <sup>a</sup>	-	-	-	-	1.000	0.389**	0.450***	0.340***	0.224*	
7. Intensity of indirectly measured institutional ambivalence: (-1 = low ... 5 = high)	-	-	-	-	-	1.000	0.258***	0.015	0.126*	
8. Intensity of indirectly measured personal ambivalence: (-1 = low ... 5 = high)	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.000	-0.137**	0.035	
9. Institutional ambivalence: (always rely on the past ... always experiment with new ways)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.000	0.195***	
10. Personal ambivalence: (always try to preserve harmony ... always allow conflicts to occur)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.000	

Source: Study 1999; N = 255 dyads.

<sup>a</sup>For correlations with this multiple nominally scaled variable the contingency coefficient is calculated, whose value is always between 0 and 1. All other values are ordinarily scaled, so that in these cases the correlation coefficient is calculated according to Spearman.

\*  $p < 0.1$ .

\*\*  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Thompson, Zanna & Griffin, 1995, p. 373ff.), we emphasize the heuristic value of this distinction between direct and indirect measurement and point to new analytic possibilities. This is especially true if we attempt to explore in more detail the experience of ambivalence from the perspectives of different family members, and look more carefully at the strategies they develop together to deal with ambivalence in daily life.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Our exploratory quantitative study confirms that parents and their adult children experience ambivalence overtly and covertly in their relationships. These experiences vary from absence to different degrees of intensity and appear in different forms. Thus, in accordance with the other studies contained in this volume and research conducted elsewhere (Connidis, 2001; Daatland & Herlofson, 2001; Jekeli, 2002; Spangler, 2002), the empirical relevance and fruitfulness of the concept of ambivalence is confirmed. The general hypothesis that intergenerational relationships require dealing with ambivalence seems to be an appropriate general orientation for research.

Empirical work on intergenerational ambivalence is still in its beginning stage. Therefore, research by necessity is exploratory. This is true for the Konstanz project, the basic orientation of which relies heavily on conceptual work Lüscher presents in Chap. 2 of this volume. For this reason, its design and methods of analysis represent but one of several types of research strategy possible at this developmental stage of the approach. The characteristics of this strategy may be seen in the breadth of its research instruments, as presented in "Research Design and Instruments" above. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, two different versions of the questionnaire were used: one for parents and one for adult children.

Beyond assessing ambivalence in direct and indirect ways, we tried to discover how the respondents deal with ambivalence and how they evaluate the experience of it. Given its breadth, the Konstanz project differs from research strategies that concentrate on one or two specific issues or on data representing one family role. Such strategies, in the early phase of an approach, have their advantages and their shortcomings. However, each of them may contribute in its way to the advancement of knowledge.

We see the guiding idea of "uncovering" ambivalence step by step, from the explicit to the implicit, as appropriate and useful. This approach undeniably stems from the origins of the concept of analysis in psychiatry and psychotherapy; in other words, it tends toward an interpretative mode of looking at results, even if

those results are gained with quantitative instruments. Such a process allows us to build a bridge between using ambivalence as a general (interpretative) concept and using it as a research construct.

This research strategy also allows us to account for the fact that people may become aware of their ambivalence and develop a conscious attitude toward it. To that end, in the closing section of the interview, we asked people to look back and to comment on the topics we addressed. A large majority of respondents reported that our questions about ambivalence were clear, understandable, and referred to situations with which they were familiar – evidence of a widespread awareness of the topic at hand.

In this connection, it is of interest that ambivalence is judged as both positive and negative, or at least is accepted as a fact of life. This insight has to be discussed in light of the correlation, documented above, between the intensity of feeling torn and the quality of relationships. Attempts to get further clarification may include exploring the possibility of a curvilinear function between experiential awareness of ambivalence and the quality of relationships. We need to explore which conditions can activate socially creative behaviors as solutions to problematic situations, and for what kind of personalities. More generally speaking, the postulate of the interplay between creativity and ambivalence is an important and challenging issue that merits further attention on both the micro- and the macro-social levels of sociological inquiry.

Throughout our analysis, the distinction between the personal-subjective and the institutional-structural dimensions of ambivalence generated distinct findings. What does this mean? These two dimensions refer to differences in the experience, the perception, and the awareness of ambivalence. In our view, and in the light of our conceptual work, this confirms an understanding of ambivalence that includes not only emotions ("mixed feelings"), but also tension between social cognition and volitions.

One area with broad implications concerns the role of gender in the experience of ambivalence. On this point, our results, as well as those from other studies, are still far from being conclusive. The topic has several implications. One may speculate, for example, if men and women differ in their susceptibility to ambivalent feelings and thoughts. Gender research and theory is reluctant to attribute psychic traits to either of the sexes without controlling for social and cultural conditions and for the role of influence and power. But the question remains as to whether specific gender dyads are more vulnerable to ambivalence, as psychoanalytic writers have suggested historically. Our findings show results that can plausibly be interpreted to support that they are. We see, for example, more institutional ambivalence between sons and fathers and sons and mothers. The special relevance of the institutional component may be caused by specific cultural expectations both parents may have

in regard to their sons because of societal customs. Yet, institutional ambivalence is also greater than subjective personal ambivalence between daughters and fathers and, to a lesser degree, between daughters and mothers. Hence, the correlation between ambivalence related to gender and ambivalence related to generational belonging may be high and may have its traces in historical developments – for instance, changes in the understanding of gender as such. The search for stronger theoretically coherent explanations about the connection and the interplay between gender (and age) is an important desideratum on the research agenda.

The Konstanz study makes an attempt to assess strategies of dealing and coping with ambivalence. Four different patterns, on different levels of sociality, have been deduced from the model. We applied two kinds of methods to reach the results, namely, questions about the approval and disapproval of general statements and reactions to vignettes presenting daily situations. Although the results confirm differences in the reactions, further explorations are needed; this is particularly true, for instance, with respect to the influence of social structures. Better results may also be found by focussing the attention on critical instances in the life course, and the history of the relationships (see Pillemer, Chap. 5 of this volume). To sum up:

- It is useful to differentiate between two dimensions or kinds of ambivalences: personal (referring to subjective closeness vs. distance) and institutional (referring to structural and institutional reproduction vs. innovation).
- It is also useful to distinguish between indicators for manifest (overt or direct) and latent (covert or indirect) ambivalences.
- It seems important to look closely at the interplay between gender and generation (e.g. between parents and adult children, and types of dyads).
- We need to explore further the connection between the intensity and the kind of ambivalence, the evaluation of the experience of ambivalence, and the quality of relationships. The interdependence may not be linear.
- We need further knowledge about the modes people use to deal and cope with ambivalence, including the processes of negotiations between the young and the old.

These desiderata will require multi-methodological approaches, further conceptual refinements and cooperative efforts.

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## APPENDIX

This appendix summarizes the key measures in the Konstanz study. We would remind the reader that the items presented below are based on the instruments used in Germany, and thus may not appear completely idiomatically accurate. The original instruments are available from the authors in both a German and an English version.

### *Direct Measures of Ambivalence*

These measures ask directly about overt ambivalences, i.e. ambivalences of which respondents were conscious in a variety of degrees. We asked respondents how often (*frequency*) they feel torn in a relationship (very often, often, now and then, seldom, never). Then we asked them to *judge* these situations with respect to how stressful they are (very stressful, stressful, only a little stressful, not stressful at all). Next, we asked respondents to *rate* these ambivalences in terms of whether they considered them positive or negative factors in their lives (very positive, more positive than negative, equally positive and negative, more negative than positive, very negative). As a measure of what we call their *concern* about ambivalence, we asked how often they had already thought about such things in the past (very often, often, now and then, seldom, never).

Next, we presented a series of possible contradictions in family relationships. We asked respondents to think about their relationship with a given person, and then report to what extent they agreed (highly, somewhat, partly, tend not to

agree, not at all) with the statement. To uncover institutional ambivalences, we asked them to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each of the following statements:

[Person] lives her/his own life, but our relationship remains the way it has always been.

Between [person] and me everything remains the same, even when changes in relationships appear important and necessary.

[Person] can do whatever she/he wants, but she/he should not forget that family members have mutual obligations.

To assess ambivalences in the personal dimension, we asked them to indicate the extent to which they agreed (highly, somewhat, partly, tend not to agree, not at all) with each of these statements:

[Person] and I often get on each other's nerves, but nevertheless we feel very close and like each other very much.

My relationship with [person] is very intimate, but that also makes it restrictive.

Although I love [person] very much, I am also sometimes indifferent toward him/her.

### *Indirect Measures of Ambivalence*

To assess ambivalence of which respondents may have been unaware, we developed a question that addresses a total of 14 attributes of ambivalence. The measure addresses the intensity of institutional and personal dimensions of ambivalence. In this measure, we asked respondents to think about their current relationship with a certain person and say to what extent the following descriptions apply (highly apply, somewhat apply, partly apply, tend not to apply, do not apply at all). To assess the institutional dimension, we asked about the applicability of attributes representing "reproduction" such as "inflexible," "restrictive," and "stuck in a rut," and of terms representing "innovation" such as "open to new experiences," and "changeable." To assess the personal dimension, we analogously asked about the applicability of attributes such as "loving," "warm," "solicitous," "reliable," and "close" in the sense of "convergence," and of terms such as "cool," "easy-going," "indifferent," and "superficial" in the sense of "divergence."

For the analysis of indirect ambivalence, we calculated a respective ambivalence value on the basis of 14 attributes for the institutional and personal relationship dimensions. First, on the basis of a factor analysis, for each subject we summed the ratings of the attribute of a pole, divided it through the number of attributes,

and rounded off. For each pole we obtained an additive sum index (Cronbach's alpha amounts for the reproduction scale 0.636, for innovation 0.684, for convergence 0.874, and for divergence 0.837). For each relationship dimension, we calculated an ambivalence value from the respective two indices according to Griffin's formula  $(P + N)/2 - (P - N)$ , where  $P$  and  $N$  stand for the index values of respectively one pole. (See Thompson, Zanna & Griffin, 1995, p. 369. On methodological problems in connection with the measurement of ambivalence, see Lettke, 2002; Lettke & Klein, in this volume.)

Querying how family members respond when situations arise in which those involved aren't exactly sure how to act (because of ambivalence) provided five of the remaining ten attributes for the measure. We asked respondents to indicate which of the following statements applied to their family when such situations arise:

We almost always rely on the way we've done things in the past.

More often than not we rely on the way we've done things in the past.

We both rely on what has worked in the past and experiment with new ways.

More often than not we experiment with new ways.

We almost always experiment with new ways.

The remaining five attributes of the measure derive from asking the extent to which the respondent and the other family member will do everything possible to preserve family harmony, or whether they will allow conflicts to occur. We asked the respondents to think about themselves and a family member and say which of the following applies to how they and that family member act when situations arise that force them to choose whether to try to preserve family harmony or allow conflicts to occur:

We almost always try to preserve family harmony.

More often than not we try to preserve family harmony.

We both try to preserve family harmony and allow conflicts to occur.

More often than not we allow conflicts to occur.

We almost always allow conflicts to occur.

### *Dealing with Ambivalence*

Our third set of measures addresses how families manage and deal with ambivalence. One measure gathers information about the general patterns of emancipation,

atomization, captivation, or solidarity that may be present. We asked respondents to indicate which of the following courses of action best characterizes how members of their family respond to situations that appear contradictory to them, and to family relationships that seem to be ambivalent:

We discuss things, above all in order to understand one another, even if in the end we cannot find clear solutions. (*emancipation*)

Since discussions only make existing tensions worse, we prefer to avoid one another and do not talk about such things. (*atomization*)

Our discussions usually end when someone forces the others to accept his or her viewpoint. (*captivation*)

We look for a compromise until everyone is satisfied. (*solidarity*)

A second part of this measure employs two vignettes. The first is about parent's continuing financial support of their offspring, and the second is about the offspring's choice of partner.

The vignette concerning the issue of financial support addresses parents' uncertainty about how they should react when an adult child asks them for money, even though he/she is earning money and also lives a life that is otherwise independent of them. We ask if any of the respondent's children has asked for money, and if so, how the respondent reacted. Then we provide a choice of alternatives oriented toward the types of response suggested by the schematic model.

The vignette addressing how parents respond to their offspring's choice of (marriage) partner gathers information about a situation that can present a dilemma for parents. Parents often have mixed feelings about the partner their child has selected and vacillate between joy and reservations. Therefore, we asked: Has the choice of (marriage) partner of one of your children given you cause to think over the pros and cons of this choice?

In the children's questionnaire, we adapted the vignettes to the perspective of the children. In both cases, the answers that respondents were to choose between were worded so as to correspond to the patterns of the schematic model.