

Keyword: Intergenerational Ambivalences

**Part 1:
Dealing with Ambivalences:
Toward a New Perspective for the Study of
Intergenerational Relations among Adults**

Kurt Lüscher/Frank Lettke

**Part 2:
Reconciling the Social and the Personal:
Ambivalences and the Multi-Generation Family**

Bertram J. Cohler

Preliminary Remarks

This working paper (Arbeitspapier) contains two parts: Part 1 is a revised version of a paper presented at a symposium, organized and chaired by David M. Klein (University of Notre Dame), on the "Analysis of Intergenerational Relationships" at the 62nd Annual Conference of the National Council on Family Relations, Minneapolis, November 10, 2000. We would like to thank David Klein for his continuing interest in the project, and his extended, manifold and useful critical comments on our work and this paper.

Bertram J. Cohler (University of Chicago) served at the symposium as discussant, and he agreed to publish his general thoughts as well as his observations concerning our presentation as part 2 of this working paper.

The session also included a presentation by Pauline Boss and Lori Kaplan on "The Link Between Ambiguous Loss and Ambivalence: Relationships between Adult Children and Elderly Parents", to be published later.

All members participating at the symposium belong to the Humboldt TransCoop Network on Intergenerational Ambivalences co-chaired by Kurt Lüscher and Karl Pillemer (Cornell University).

Furthermore, we would like to thank Sabrina Böhmer, Anette Fintz-Müller and Brigitte Pajung-Bilger for their collaboration in the project, Wolfgang Lauterbach for his suggestions concerning the analysis of the data, James Brice for editorial help, and Juan Wu for general student assistance.

A shorter version of this paper was presented at the "Thirtieth Congress of the German Sociological Association" in Cologne, September 28, 2000, Plenum IV "Familie, Generation und Sozialisation" (see Lettke/Lüscher 2000).

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Part 1

Dealing with Ambivalences: Toward a New Perspective for the Study of Intergenerational Relations among Adults

1. Conceptual Considerations

The study of intergenerational relations within families is flourishing both in the USA and in Europe. This reflects their rising importance in contemporary society. In light of the paradoxes inherent in processes of modernization,¹ societal diagnoses of our time refer both in their theoretical arguments and in their empirical findings to the fragility of interpersonal relations. One encounters a rather contradictory argumentation, which could be called a "generational paradox." It means, on one side, that intergenerational relations are endangered on all social levels: society, organizations, firms and family. On the other side, these relations are seen as ties which guarantee social integration.²

In empirical research, it is important to take into account the phenomenological plurality of intergenerational relations. This plurality is the consequence of demographic, social, and cultural transformations:

- 1) The rise in life expectancy,³ i.e. longevity is expanding the shared lifetime of parents and children (though children are born later), and moreover of three and even four generations.⁴ These demographic transformations have created a potential for more extensive intergenerational relations than ever before in history,⁵ but also – often repressed – for conflicting interests. They add a new dimension to the task of living and organizing these relations.
- 2) Differential patterns of family formation resulting from cohabitation, successive partnerships and couples living-apart-together are putting in question the self-evidence of traditional modes of interaction between generations (see for example Coontz 2000).
- 3) Societal developments in the reorganization of social welfare, the political recognition of the power of different age groups as well as age cohorts and the

¹ A useful conceptualization of the "project and the paradox of modernization" with reference to a general theory of action and agency is provided by van der Loo/van Reijen (1997). For a brief presentation in the regard to the present topic, see Lüscher (2000b).

² The paradoxical character of intergenerational relations in contemporary society is also treated, in a somehow different perspective, by Bengtson et al. (1985).

³ In Germany, men born between 1901/1910 had a life expectancy of 45 years, women of 48 years, for men born between 1995/1997 it is estimated to be 74 and for women 80 years (Source: Statistical Yearbook of Germany 1999. For more differentiated data see Engstler 1999).

⁴ To give just one example from Germany: Of the children born between 1941/46, 13 % had the opportunity, at age 10, to know all four grandparents. For those born 1981/86, this share is 36% (Lauterbach 1999).

⁵ Statistical data on families and households is provided by Engstler (1999). Overviews on families in Europe are given by Bégeot/Fernandez-Cordon (1997) and Höpflinger (1997).

distribution of knowledge and skills between generations are influencing the awareness, the understanding and the relevance of age cohorts.

We should be aware that the phenomenological and the structural plurality of intergenerational relations is shaped by differences between cultures, by the role of the state in the organization of social welfare and medicine, which is connected with general ideas about family.⁶ From a formal theoretical point of view, the awareness of plurality reinforces ambiguities and contingencies.⁷

Beyond these differences, it is noteworthy that research in Europe and the USA offers, broadly speaking, a two-sided picture.

- On one hand, a considerable number of studies have identified different dimensions of intergenerational solidarity and found more or less confirming evidence. Major contributions in this perspective have been made by Vern Bengtson and his associates (Bengtson et al. 1985, 1991),⁸ and earlier by Reuben Hill (1970).

In Europe, this side of the picture also includes nation-wide assessments of the transfers across three generations. Thus, financial provisions are made by the older, whereas the younger perform daily errands and caring activities. These intergenerational transfers have been the focus of work in Germany by Martin Kohli and his associates (Kohli 1999, Kohli/Künemund 2000, Kohli/Szydlik 2000), in France by Claudine Attias-Donfut (1992, 1995), in England by Alan

⁶ See, for example, in regard to its implication for social welfare, Dreman (1997), Gauthier (1996), Coontz (2000), Kaufmann (2000).

⁷ This argument is developed, with reference to postmodernism, in Lüscher (1998a). See also Marris (1991, 1996).

⁸ Vern Bengtson, using as a point of departure a solidarity approach, for which he and his research groups have developed several differentiated perspectives, points out that conflict is also a constituent of social relations. As a consequence, he considers his approach as a synthesis of symbolic interactionist, conflict and functionalistic theories (personal communication). See also his Burgess Award Lecture (Bengtson 2001), here especially his discussion on implications for multigenerational family research.

Although there are notable similarities in his views and ours, as discussed also at the NCFR symposium, we do not think that the ambivalence perspective is just another term for intergenerational conflict. Rather, the ambivalence hypothesis, as we define it (see below), is an attempt to take into account the coexistence of solidarity and conflict, searching for a concept which can account for both and differentiate between them. Thus, ambivalence is meant to be a more general assumption based on what we called an "image of man" or a meta-condition for social relations among human beings. A comparison between the two approaches, "solidarity" vs. "ambivalence" will have to include the theoretical foundations, the processes of operationalization, the data and the policy implications. See in this connection also the papers prepared in the "OASIS" project group which is conducting an international study on "Old Age and Autonomy: The Role of Service Systems and Intergenerational Solidarity" (Lowenstein et al. 2000, and with special reference to the relevance of ambivalence, the paper by Kingston/Phillips/Ray 2000, see also Scharf/Phillipson/Kingston/Smith 2000).

Walker (1996) and in New Zealand by David Thompson (1996). An international comparison is provided by Rein (1994).

- On the other hand, research confirms that tensions between parents and their adult children can lead to maltreatment, and even to abuse. An overview of this work is provided by Karl Pillemer and Jill Suitor (1992). Along these lines, the emotional hardship of providing care is widely recognized.

Given these contrasting findings, reviewers have emphasized the necessity of theoretical and conceptual frames which allow us to take into account the many facets of intergenerational relations and to structure them before the background of general theoretical orientations. This view has been expressed in particular by Victor Marshall et al. (1993) and by Diane Lye (1996). An important desideratum is to avoid the normative connotations which are contained, at least implicitly, in the concept of solidarity, if it is used as the major point of reference, since "solidarity" is positively evaluated.

A thoughtful comprehensive approach can be found in work by Finch/Mason (1992). They concentrate on processes of negotiation both among the generations and – in regard to the sharing of concrete tasks – among the different family members of the younger generation. Noteworthy contributions on a conceptual level have also been made by the Geneva research group (Coenen-Huther, Kellerhals and von Almen 1994). They organize their work around the notion of "justice". Still another focus, centered on "relationships" as a basic orientation, characterizes the work of Donati (1995) in Italy.

These different attempts suggest that an innovative conceptualization of the dynamics of intergenerational relations should take into account the possibility of contradictory attitudes and behaviors, the relevance of these relations for identity formation and their reference to tasks. This argumentation has been developed by Lüscher/Pillemer (1998).

Here, in an attempt to take into account what seems to be simultaneous contradictory experiences and judgment of intergenerational relations, both on the

microlevel of personal interaction and on the structural level of aggregated behaviors and institutionalized rules, we turned to the concept of ambivalence.⁹

The term recommended itself as a plausible label on the level of refined everyday language: For instance, the *Collins English Dictionary* sums up ambivalence or ambivalency as "the co-existence of two opposed and conflicting emotions, etc." and in its thesaurus it refers to "contradiction... equivocation, fracturation ... opposition, uncertainty, vacillation". The *Oxford English Dictionary* points to "the co-existence in one person or one work of contradictory emotions and attitudes towards the same object or situation (or thing)". The etymology is rooted in 'ambi', which means two or twofold, and 'valence', which refers to values or valuation. Going into more detail, it is noteworthy that the term 'ambi' is also contained in the word amphi-theater. We may say that it suggests two sides within a whole or a unity. The *Oxford English Dictionary* also brings to our attention a full range of examples in the history of the term, from psychology to anthropology, literary criticism and philosophy. Even though many examples emphasize emotions and attitudes, the term is not exclusively connected with them.

Further explorations in the history of the term provide support for applying it to the study of intergenerational relations. The term was created by the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler.¹⁰ He used it as a construct in the phenomenology of "negativism" and the diagnosis of "schizophrenia" (Bleuler 1910/1911). But from the very beginning he also pointed out that ambivalences can be observed in normal (non-pathological) behavior, in that it refers to emotions, cognitions and volitions. Already in 1914, he gave an encyclopaedic overview of different possible uses of the term, among them the analysis of the father-complex in myths (Bleuler 1914: 103).

⁹ For an early analysis of the two-sidedness of parent-child relationships in adulthood, see, for example, Cohler (1983). Cohler and Beeler (1999), by the way, also use the concept of ambivalence. The concept can in addition be found in texts by Rosenmayer (1983, 1992) without an explicated definition and/or operationalization for empirical research (see Lüscher 2000a).

¹⁰ Several authors, among them Merton/Barber (1963), refer to a publication, quoted as Bleuler 1911, which turns out to be the minutes of a meeting of the Society of Swiss Psychiatrists, held in Bern in 1910. These minutes, written by Riklin, summarize a lecture by Bleuler on ambivalence. They were published both in the *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse* 1/1911: 266-269 and the *Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift* 1911: 405-407. The first discussant was C. G. Jung who called ambivalence a potentially valuable enrichment of the psychiatric vocabulary.

Looking at the history of the concept since its creation we may distinguish different lines of development in the disciplines of psychiatry, psychoanalysis, clinical psychology, social psychology, social anthropology, sociology, literary and art criticism, education (pedagogics), philosophy and theology. In all those fields attention is given, in a more or less differentiated way, to the concept of ambivalence, but rarely is a precise definition offered. One gets the impression that it is a "sensitizing concept" (Blumer). But this open-ended usage has facilitated its penetration into everyday speech. – A synoptic history of the concept is not yet available.¹¹ By way of illustration, we will refer briefly to three fields which are especially relevant in the context of our topic.

Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy: Freud took up the concept in several of his texts, often making a positive reference to the invention of the term as such. He first used it in a theory of "transference" (Freud 1975/1912). He also connected it with his theory of "drives" and of "totem and taboo". – C. G. Jung wanted to understand the concept in a more general way as an expression of basic polarization. Many other authors have linked the term to a psychoanalytically oriented theory of identity formation and development, such as Abraham, Klein, Spitz, Erikson, Minuchin, Boszormenyi-Nagi, Stierlin, Richter, Bauriedel. The term has also been used in theories of motivation and learning by Lewin, Dollard and Miller, Festinger, Heider and Bischoff, and it has also come to be used in family therapy (see Otscheret 1988 and Boss 1998).¹² – A first approximation suggests the conclusion that the concept has been gradually extended to include social meanings and applications. This coincides with the attention found in sociology.

Sociology: In the mid-sixties a sociological reception was initiated by a group of scholars led by Merton/Barber (1963), and Coser (1965). They demonstrated the usefulness of the concept for the analysis of social roles and role conflicts, as well as for organizational analysis and understanding the dilemmas arising in professions, especially in medicine (Merton 1976). The work of Lewis Coser demonstrates, in addition, an affinity to conflict theory in sociology, without being absorbed by it. This merits attention, because it indicates that the use of the concept may be bound to paradigmatic choices.

¹¹ We are currently preparing, as part of our project, a more comprehensive analysis of the available sources.

¹² See also the references given in the text by Cohler in part 2 of this working paper.

New interest can be observed in the nineties, the leading author being Zygmunt Bauman (1995) in writings related to postmodernism. Of importance from a societal perspective is the analysis of the ambivalent structure of the category of gender in contemporary feminist writings. Similar to the differences between the young and the old, ambivalence is used here with reference to a basic condition of human sociability. A very recent reference to the concept of ambivalence is Smelser's 1997 ASA presidential address (Smelser 1998). He proposed the reintroduction of the concept as an alternative, or better as a complement, to those propositions and those ideas of social contact which dealt with this in terms of rationality and using the postulate of rational choice. Thus he is referring to the paradigmatic relevance of the concept. Further, and in a way very compatible with our proposal to use the concept in regard to intergenerational family relations, he stated: "My general proposition is that dependent situations breed ambivalence, and correspondingly, models of behavior based on the postulate of ambivalence are the most applicable." (Smelser 1998: 8)

Literary criticism: The use of the term in this field is noteworthy for two reasons. Firstly, it suggests what Reinhartz (1986) quite appropriately labelled "Loving and Hating One's Elders: Twin Themes in Legend and Literature". Indeed, the literature on parent-child relations, both in the past and in the present, provides strong support for our perspective. Secondly, writings such as Franz Kafka's "Die Verwandlung" (Metamorphosis) not only describe ambivalences, but also deliberately evoke experiences of ambivalence in the reader.¹³ A closer look at critical literature also shows that ambivalence as an overt or covert topic can be found in many classical texts.

2. Research Strategies: Intergenerational Ambivalences "Operationalized"

However, in view of the usefulness for research, particularly on intergenerational relations, the crucial question arises of how the concept can be put to work, e.g. "operationalized." As a point of departure, we suggest that the study of

¹³ This aspect was brought to our attention by Ulrich Gaier in the course of a seminar on "Ambivalence in social and literary sciences." For an example of the later, see Seidler (1969). One may also add, in regard to evocation of ambivalences, a reference to ambivalence in art. To give just one example: Several works of the American painter Edward Hopper (1882-1967) can well be interpreted as both displaying ambivalences and creating an impression of ambivalences (Levin 1981).

intergenerational relations should explore the following *general heuristic hypothesis*: Intergenerational relations imply dealing with ambivalences.

First we would like to emphasize what we mean by this term.¹⁴ It may be understood as a meta-hypothesis insofar as it states a general assumption which may prove to be scientifically fruitful or not, the latter being a kind of falsification. For this reason we call it both heuristic and general. As a general "statement" it encourages and necessitates – on different levels – conceptual differentiations in a dialogue with empirical data. Ultimately it leads to specific operationalizations. This methodology is akin to Bronfenbrenner's idea of "research in the discovery mode" (Bronfenbrenner/Morris 1998).

We would like to point out that the term "implies dealing with", besides postulating the empirical relevance of ambivalences, should underline the pragmatistic and action-oriented perspective of our approach.¹⁵

- Ambivalences are *not* ontologically present in intergenerational relations, but are rather an empirical quality or feature which may be experienced in a particular case and can be attributed to these relations in a way useful in social analysis.
- This experience is not universal and empirical research must study and assess empirically the population groups which experience ambivalences, and to the contexts and tasks which may evoke experiences which can be interpreted as ambivalent. Thus, we foresee in the course of research a distinction of different types of ambivalences.

Before the background of the etymology and the history of the concept, but without going into further details, we would like to present the following *overarching definition*: We speak of ambivalences if polarizations of (simultaneous) emotions, thoughts, social relations and structures, which are considered relevant for the constitution of individual or collective identities, are (or can be) interpreted as temporarily or permanently irreconcilable.

¹⁴ This was suggested to us by the philosopher of science Paul Hoyningen-Huene (personal communication).

¹⁵ See also Lüscher (1995).

This definition contains the elements which must be operationalized for research purposes, and they must be taken into account more explicitly as this is the case in the polished and harmonized everyday usage of the term. Particularly:

- Not all contradictions, conflicts and tensions are regarded as expressions of ambivalences, but only those which cannot be resolved by simple choices or decision-making.
- Experiences interpreted as "ambivalent" not only concern emotions, but cognitions and intentions as well, and they are very often integrated. For this reason, and in accordance with Bleuler's understanding, we do not strictly separate these three aspects of ambivalences, but it may be desirable to do this in later stages of work with the concept.
- The polarizations should be experienced or interpreted as simultaneous, e.g. meaningfully connected to each other. This temporal dimension can include a shorter or a longer time interval, e.g. it can refer to social definitions of time. In our earlier research (Lüscher/Pajung-Bilger 1998), we made the distinction between situational and life-course references. The choice of the temporal references is dependent on the specific research question.
- The experience of what may be metaphorically described as "suspended, expanding juxtaposition" should be considered as overtly or covertly meaningful for the constitution of identity. This reference can be deduced from the origin of the concept in psychiatry and psychotherapy. There should be an explicit or implicit reference to the relevance for the development of a self or an identity. This reference may also be important for the specification of the temporal extension of "simultaneity."¹⁶
- It may be appropriate to have in mind both personal and collective identities. The latter is the case in a sociological perspective which may attempt to attribute ambivalences to collective phenomena such as nationalism. Since personal and collective identities may be interwoven, the concept of ambivalence offers itself as a micro-macro link.¹⁷
- It is important to point out the distinction between the experience of ambivalence and its assessment. The latter may also be done by the (scientific) observer or by a therapist. Ambivalences – or more precisely indicators of

¹⁶ This is especially relevant if one wants to study relations. It is quite feasible to refer to a certain period of the common life-span of parents and children as reference for ambivalences. Their kind and their weight may change over time. These and similar implications of the concept are still to be more fully explored. – We would like to thank Bert Adams who brought up this topic in the discussion-round of the symposium at the NCFR-meeting.

¹⁷ Conceiving ambivalence as a conceptual link between the personal and the social is a major topic in the commentary by Bert Cohler (see part 2 of this working paper)

ambivalences – may be overt or covert, and can be labelled manifest or latent.¹⁸

In most cases, and especially for the study of intergenerational relations, the emphasis is placed on the experiences of parents and their children. The study of families in later life stages may be strategically especially relevant, because both parties can look back on a long history of their relations, and one can also assume that there is a greater awareness of the different determinants in their interrelations.

In an attempt to put the idea of intergenerational ambivalence to work, we first tried to position it within recent developments in the field (Lüscher/Pillemer 1998). We then conducted three empirical studies. In the 1997 study we used the concept as a basis for a secondary analysis of qualitative data we had obtained in a study of adult sons, daughters and their parents concerning the way they organize their intergenerational relations after divorce (Lüscher/Pajung-Bilger 1998). Here, we paid special conceptual attention to identifying the basic dimensions of social relations. We found it useful to distinguish between a personal dimension and an institutional dimension. For each we defined poles of ambivalent experience:

a) The "institutional dimension": Intergenerational relations are imbedded in a family system which is characterized, sociologically speaking, by the structural, procedural, and normative conditions in a society. These institutional givens shape familial relationships. They create a "family world" into which the individual is born. Following the premises of a pragmatic-interactionistic or social constructivistic notion of social institutions, such as developed by Berger/ Luckmann (1967: 47-128), these institutional conditions are, on one side, reinforced and reproduced by the way people act out their relations. On the other side, these conditions can also be modified and can lead to innovations.

One can see "reproduction" and "innovation" as the two poles of the social field in which the family is realized as an institution. These two poles may be conceived of as referring to structural ambivalence, at least from the viewpoint of the scientific observer. Institutional preconditions are always

¹⁸ For this distinction see Merton (1976: 60ff.). Here, the author points out to the use of those two contexts by Freud! Of course, this terminology is not bound to a functionalistic orientation.

referencepoints for any "definition of the situation" (W. I. Thomas) in terms of concrete actions. Total changes seem, at least within the span of two or three generations, unlikely.

We will illustrate this with an example on the societal level. Here, the very term family, regardless of all the debates, is not being replaced (although there are some proposals to do so). Rather, new forms of living together are being defined against the background of traditional forms, as demonstrated, for instance, by the term 'reconstituted' families. The same is the case on the individual level, where the memory of experiencing a certain type of family and a certain institutionalized notion of family persists over several generations. Take, for example, the case of research on family memory. In this connection, Segalen (1993: 160) and Lüscher/Pajung-Bilger (1998) speak of a transmission which refers both to what may be called a pattern of giving (from one generation) and a pattern of receiving (to the other generation).

However, it is neither useful nor appropriate to think that structures and forms can be completely reproduced. Such a position is at least not compatible with a sociology which uses actors as subjects (as for instance in Mead's model of personality). Incomplete reproduction is also due to the dependence of the family as an institutional subsystem of society and its connection to its environment.

From an institutional point of view, intergenerational relations are thus lived out or shaped in a field between what may be called reproduction and innovation. This polarity contains, at least covertly or latently, ambivalences. It is an empirical question to what extent these ambivalences become explicit because the members of a family are aware of them, or to what extent they are brought to their attention, for instance, in family therapy or in comparison with other families.

- b) The "personal", subjective dimension: Parents and children and the members of other involved generations share a certain degree of similarity. This could even be attributed to biological inheritance. However, any inheritance is incomplete, because not all genes are shared between individual parents and individual children. The similarity is also reinforced by the intimacy of mutual learning processes. They contain a potential for closeness and subjective identification. At the same time, and especially in growing older, the similarity is also a cause of and reason for distancing. Ultimately, children come to have a different personal identity than their parents.

Consequently, on this intersubjective dimension as well, we may postulate an ambivalent polarity. It may be characterized by the two terms "convergence" and "divergence". These terms are general labels which may be specified in connection with specific contexts.

Using these two dimensions we also suggested a fourfold typology of strategies for dealing with intergenerational relations (Lüscher 1998b, 2000a, see also the model of intergenerational ambivalence in the appendix).¹⁹

On this basis we developed, in co-operation with Karl Pillemer, a series of instruments to be used in quantitative analysis. In the 1998 study we started with a telephone survey in order to get information about the living arrangements of families in the Konstanz region. Based on this data we selected respondents and conducted personal interviews with them and their relatives in the 1999 study.²⁰ Here, we basically distinguish the following units of analysis:

- Assessment of relationships: People describe their perceptions of different relationships.
- Awareness of ambivalence: People tell us about their experienced ambivalence, or we compare utterances containing assessments of relationships with regard to ambivalences.
- Management of ambivalence: People were asked to tell us something about the ways in which they handle ambivalent situations.²¹

¹⁹ For further details see also the overview of the Konstanz projects on intergenerational ambivalence in the appendix to this paper.

²⁰ Out of the 528 respondents of the 1998 study, about 90 persons were selected according to three criteria: (1) They should be in an intergenerational position in order to increase the chances of follow-up interviews with their relatives. (2) Since education was expected to be related to ambivalence, we differentiated between high or low formal educational level. (3) In order to compare families with many or few experience of ambivalence, we also differentiated respondents' high or low reported ambivalence in their family. Starting with these 90 persons, we also tried to interview their parents (when respondents belonged to the adult-child generation) or their adult children (when they belonged to the parent generation). The resulting data base of the 1999 study was 52 interviews with adult children and 72 interviews with parents. In these 124 interviews, respondents referred to 255 dyadic relationships. These 255 dyads are the data base for most of the following analyses. We would like to thank David Klein for his suggestion to follow this line of analysis. First results of the study can be found in working paper no. 34 by Böhmer (2000), Lettke (2000a) and Lüscher et al. (2000).

²¹ See also the schematic overview of the questionnaire's composition in the appendix. The research instruments – in German and English – are available as Arbeitspapier Nr. 34.4 (see Lüscher et al. 2000).

3. Results

Based on our conceptual considerations and operationalization, ambivalences can be diagnosed either by respondents themselves or by scientists. In the first case, ambivalences are part of everyday experience and knowledge. They are topics of respondents' thoughts, feelings and reports, and corresponding questions can directly address issues of ambivalence. In the second case, ambivalences can be diagnosed by means of scientific comparison or synopsis. A simple cross-tabulation, for example, displays information on an elaborated analytical level. Again, the basis for analysis are the respondents' answers, but descriptions of ambivalence do not necessarily imply respondents' awareness of that phenomenon. That's why these findings are part of what could be called "research knowledge." In the following we consider first the everyday experience and turn then to a differentiated analysis.

3.1 Everyday Experience

Our hypothesis that intergenerational relations imply dealing with ambivalences summarizes an almost commonplace experience. Parents as well as adult children quite often feel torn in two directions. This is supported by data from the 1999 study.

First: Being asked to what extent they feel torn in two directions, only 20% of the respondents never felt torn.²²

²² All mentioned questions stem from the study 1999 and are documented in working paper no. 34.4 (see Lüscher et al. 2000). Question 18 was: "Sometimes, family members can feel torn in two directions in their relationship with one another. Thinking about your relationship with [person], how often do you feel torn in two directions?" Other questions on the experience of ambivalences refer to the stress caused by ambivalences (question 19) and to opposed orientations in the behavior in dyadic relationships as well as in the family as a whole (questions 15, 16, 22 and 23).

Table 1: Feeling Torn in Two Directions (Percent)

very often	4
often	11
now and then.....	29
seldom	35
never.....	20

N = 255 Dyads
Source: Study 1999

The relevance of the topic "ambivalence" in everyday life is further underlined by the finding that in 39% of the dyadic relationships respondents report having "often" and "very often" thought about ambivalences in the past. Only 3% considered ambivalence irrelevant for their situation.

Table 2: Thoughts about Ambivalences (Percent)²³

very often	9
often	30
now and then.....	39
seldom	19
never.....	3

N = 123 Persons
Source: Study 1999

Contrary to widely held opinions, ambivalences in the sense of feeling torn in two directions are judged negatively by only a minority. Half of our sample states that ambivalences are "equally positive and negative," and 40% even see them as positive.²⁴

²³ The relevant question 52 reads as follows: "And how often have you already thought about such things in the past?"

²⁴ Question 51 was: "Would you say in summary that you see these ambivalences as very positive, more positive than negative, equally positive and negative, more negative than positive or very negative?"

Table 3: Evaluation of Ambivalences (Percent)

very positive.....	1
more positive than negative	39
equally positive and negative.....	50
more negative than positive	9
very negative.....	2

N = 118 Persons
Source: Study 1999

This is a remarkable finding, because it points to an open-minded pragmatistic conception of ambivalences as part of the task of shaping intergenerational relations.

A further example for the experience of ambivalence are the contradictorily formulated statements about relationships in question 21: "[Person] and I often get on each other's nerves, but nevertheless we feel very close and like each other very much" is a statement of ambivalent emotions, agreed with by 24% of respondents. Other examples are: "My relationship with my [person] is very intimate, but that also makes it restrictive" (11.6% agreement) or "Although I love my [person] very much, I am also sometimes indifferent toward him/her" (13.4% agreement). On the average, we find 36% agreement with the contradictory statements.

Table 4: Agreement with Contradictory Statements about Relationships (Percent)

agree.....	36
partly agree	20
do not agree.....	44

N = 228 Dyads
Source: Study 1999

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. The reason for the different results of the two measures can be seen in the differences between the questions. Whereas the one refers to the general report of feeling torn the others are more contextualized items. Further instruments will have to be developed in order to construct more differentiated and more reliable scales.²⁵

In the next step we link these everyday experiences with other variables. This is an analytical perspective and leads up to a differential analysis.

3.2 Differentiated Analysis

Table 5 differentiates the feeling of being torn in different dyadic relationships.

Table 5: "Frequently" Torn in Two Directions (Percent Related to Dyads)

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

Sig. = .693; N = 254 Dyads²⁶

Source: Study 1999

The general absence of significant differences contrasts with the peculiarities of specific dyads in terms of generation and gender. Compared to relationships between fathers and daughters (48%- resp. 50%-level), in relationships between fathers and sons fewer subjects report ambivalences (41%- resp. 42%-level). Of special interest is the degree of reciprocity of these views among the different familial positions. We find few differences between the answers of children and fathers. This means that children report ambivalences with regard to their father to the same degree as fathers report ambivalences with regard to their daughters and sons. When we turn to relationships with mothers, clear differences show up.

²⁵ In a next step we will have to relate to the feeling of being torn with individual contexts so that this feeling can be differentiated.

²⁶ The values of significance refer to Pearson's r.

The strongest difference exists in relationships between mothers and sons: Whereas mothers most frequently report experiences of feeling torn (51%), sons represent, according to their answers, the least ambivalent group (32%, see also shaded cells in Table 5). Of the daughters, 54% report frequent feelings of being torn in their relationship with their mother. In contrast, only 39% of the mothers answer this way.

This kind of differentiation is easy to accept, but what about the assumption of a personal and an institutional dimension of ambivalence?²⁷ Operationalizing these ideas, we constructed an indicator for ambivalence, using a list of attributes which describe the relationship.²⁸ Attributes like "warm" or "loving" are associated with the pole "convergence." Attributes like "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." The applicability of each attribute was rated on a five-point Likert scale. Factor analysis helped in finding suitable attributes for constructing the respective scale. Each scale shows the same five 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." Since ambivalence in intergenerational relations has not been subject to quantitative research, our aim in this study was the mere discovery of ambivalences as such. Therefore we do not consider ambivalence as a fluent variable in this case.²⁹

²⁷ This distinction seems compatible with Cohler's considerations about the personal and the social (see part 2).

²⁸ The attributes are presented in question 27 of the questionnaire.

²⁹ This is not only a question of adequate calculation but also one of the phenomenon's nature. Can ambivalence be differentiated in terms of intensity and are high ambivalence and no ambivalence results of the same linear function? We find our sceptical view supported by Priester and Petty (1996). For the measurement of ambivalence, also see working Paper 34.3 by Lettke (2000a). Lettke and Klein are currently working on a text concerning the measurement of ambivalences to be included in: Karl Pillemer and Kurt Lüscher (in prep.). In the present study, the two scales from opposing poles (each covering applicability, semi-applicability and non-applicability) can be combined in a fourfold way: As already mentioned, the applicability of both poles results in ambivalence. The applicability of one pole and non-applicability of the other pole represent clear-cut answers. Partly applicability of at least one pole is labeled "partly ambivalent" and no applicability of both poles is termed "irrelevance". Irrelevance in this case refers only to the two poles of a dimension and must not be misunderstood as implying the general irrelevance of a relationship.

Our analysis shows generally that on the average, respondents experience institutional ambivalences more frequently (47%) than personal ambivalences (31%, no tables given).³⁰ In addition, institutional ambivalences occur more often among children. Personal ambivalences, on the other hand, occur somewhat more often among parents.³¹

Differentiated into dyads, we can find little variance in personal ambivalences (see Table 6). However, we find that ambivalences appear more often in relationships with male family members (fathers and sons). Here again, the son-mother dyad – in sharp contrast to the other relationships – shows a remarkable difference.

Table 6: Inferred Personal Ambivalence (Percent Related to Dyads)

Respondent	Person Referred to			
	Father	Mother	Son	Daughter
Father	-	-	45	36
Mother	-	-	36	23
Son	44	18	-	-
Daughter	32	22	-	-

Sig. = .201; N = 237 Dyads
Source: Study 1999

The mother-son dyad also bears the strongest difference with respect to institutional ambivalence, but in the opposite direction, as can be seen in Table 7. This goes along with the general finding that institutional ambivalence can be

³⁰ In the institutional dimension we found 48% clear-cut answers and 5% of cases in the category "irrelevant". In the personal dimension, 65% of the answers could be labeled as "clear-cut" and 3% as "irrelevant". The cases labeled "irrelevant" could point to families in which there is the least a potential for ambivalences as focused in our study, because according to their judgements our items do not apply to their relationships. The fact that this is only true for a minority underlines the adequacy of the instrument.

³¹ A reason for this distribution could be that children are more concerned with institutional aspects like distancing from their parents, whereas personal aspects in relationships are more important for parents. This goes together with the finding that parents characterize the relationships with their children as more close than vice versa. This is a common finding in intergenerational research. The different presence of the two kinds of ambivalences could have a common origin, namely dependency, which Smelser stresses as a circumstance that "breeds ambivalence" (1998: 8). Parents, as members of a more established or settled ("institutionalized") generation facing a growing distance to their children, are dependent on the emotional aspects of the relationship. Children, being sure of their parents' love, are more dependant on the institutionalized patterns of (family) life, because their experience is limited for the simple reason of age.

attributed to children – especially to sons. Another parallel finding is that in most dyads ambivalences occur more frequently in relationships with male relatives.

Table 7: Inferred Institutional Ambivalence (Percent Related to Dyads)

Respondent	Person Referred to			
	Father	Mother	Son	Daughter
Father	-	-	43	37
Mother	-	-	41	30
Son	74	84	-	-
Daughter	60	44	-	-

Sig. = .000; Cramer's V = .343; N = 237 Dyads
 Source: Study 1999

In summary, we can say that institutional ambivalence is more common and varies to a higher degree with different dyadic relationships. Obviously, the role of sons and especially the mother-son dyad seem to have a special meaning in family relations in regard to ambivalences.

Moreover, the reported results reveal striking oppositions: Experienced ambivalences of sons with regard to their mothers are less frequently reported. This is compatible with the indirect indicator for personal ambivalence, but it is quite opposed to that for institutional ambivalence. Here, we find a maximum of ambivalence. How can these discrepancies be explained?

We may hypothesize that, when asked directly about the feeling of being torn, respondents immediately associate personal aspects of relationships, that is aspects of closeness or distance. As has been shown, personal ambivalence is least frequent in son-mother dyads as reported by sons. Another explanation points to *latent ambivalences*. Latent ambivalences can be diagnosed when respondents state that they "seldom" or "never" feel torn in two directions, even though we are able to identify ambivalences in the attitudes 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).

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 this situation. These aspects of the relationship are so central that they require a "solution" by the subjects.

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%). This requires more detailed analysis in future research.

Table 8: Attributed Latent Institutional Ambivalence (Percent Related to Dyads)

Respondent	Person Referred to			
	Father	Mother	Son	Daughter
Father	-	-	18	15
Mother	-	-	18	10
Son	44	56	-	-
Daughter	30	22	-	-

Sig. = .007; Cramer's V = .243; N = 227 Dyads

Source: Study 1999

At the moment, we can at least point out that ambivalences are a stressful experience, especially when they occur in a manifest form.³² In this respect, the two kinds of ambivalence, institutional and personal, seem to make little difference. Whereas 59.1% of the respondents to whom we attributed manifest personal ambivalence experience the feeling of being torn as stressful, only 25.0% of respondents with latent personal ambivalences feel this way.³³ In the case of manifest institutional ambivalence, 57.1% report feelings of stress. Respondents

³² In question 19 we asked: "... how stressfull is it for you to feel torn in two directions regarding [person]?"

³³ Sig. = .000; Cramer's V = .321.

to whom latent institutional ambivalence is attributed report stress in 34.1% of all cases.³⁴

Consequently, the proportion of reported poor relationships is larger in cases of manifest ambivalence than in cases of latent ambivalence. With regard to respondents with manifest personal ambivalence 81.0% describe their relationships as poor (19.0% as good). With regard to latent personal ambivalence, 69.7% of the respondents report good (30.3% poor) relationships.³⁵ We find similar results in the institutional dimension.³⁶

A further step of analysis is the *contextualization* of ambivalences. Here, one important question is what circumstances either stimulate or reduce ambivalences. The central variable in this regard is the quality of the relationship. A poor-quality relationship corresponds strongly with more frequent ambivalence.

Table 9: Ambivalence and Quality of Relationship in Intergenerational Relations (Percent)

Feeling Torn	Quality of Relationship	
	Good	Fair / Poor
Often	29	73
Seldom	71	27

Sig. = .000; Cramer's V = .427; N = 249 Dyads
Source: Study 1999

It is difficult to determine the direction of causality, because ambivalences may cause poor relationships, and poor relationships may lead to feelings of being torn. 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. However, other findings suggest that this relation is not linear. In addition, quality of relationship is also a dependent variable, and

³⁴ Sig. = .000; Cramer's V = .335.

³⁵ Sig. = .000; Cramer's V = .390.

³⁶ Here, 59.3% of respondents with manifest institutional ambivalence describe their relationships as poor (40.7% as good). Respondents with latent institutional ambivalence report good (25.0% poor) relationships in 75.0% of cases. Sig. = .000; Cramer's V = .320.

further investigation should concentrate on the relation between these two causalities.³⁷

We found other predictors for the feeling of being torn. One was the centrality of ambivalence: The probability of such feelings rises with the intensity of thoughts on ambivalence. But this seems to be true only for daughters, but not for sons or for parents. Other sociodemographic variables like education, professional status or religiousness have no predictive effect. This result shows the importance of the microsocial level for the understanding of intergenerational ambivalence in the family. Moreover, it gives clues for further research strategies. One goal would be to gain more detailed information about authentic family life. But, microsocial analysis is only one side. One should not ignore that parents and children also belong to different cohorts which have been influenced by different political, economic or social circumstances and that the composition of these different life courses in individual families is the background for actual family life.

The last step of our analysis leads us to the question of how respondents deal with ambivalences. Here, we are concentrating on the feeling of being torn as a starting point, because this is the most reliable indicator for experienced ambivalence. According to our model and the qualitative study of Lüscher/Pajung-Bilger (see appendix), we have deduced four *different strategies in dealing with ambivalences*: solidarity, emancipation, atomization and captivation. With regard to four instruments in the questionnaire (see Table 10), different frequencies show up.³⁸

It can be seen that, although varying in value, solidarity and emancipation are the dominant strategies, but atomization and captivation also occur. One could argue

³⁷ Are they, for example, linked with different kinds of relationships or families, or can we imagine combining temporal structures? One could imagine latent ambivalences causing poor relationships and these relationships could result in manifest ambivalences and may deteriorate the relationship even more. This thought underlines the dynamics of relationships which the concept of ambivalence has to take into consideration. Of course, this would require longitudinal data which is not yet available. See also Lettke (2000b) who draws attention to the formative power of socialization for parent-child relationships throughout life. See also Lang (2000) who is concentrating on the quality of relationships in later phases of parent-child relationships and on the impact of 'filial maturity.'

³⁸ The corresponding questions in the questionnaire are no. 12, 14 and the two vignettes encountered in question 34 and following and in question 42 and following.

that the first two strategies are positively connotated and therefore are more affected by social desirability response sets.³⁹

Table 10: Strategies for Dealing with Ambivalences in Different Questions (Percent)

Management Questions	Strategies				N=Persons
	Solidarity	Emancipation	Atomization	Captivation	
1. How family members get along	59	29	2	10	119
2. How family members handle ambivalent situations	26	57	13	5	120
3. Reactions in case of requested financial support by children	54	28	10	7	116
4. Reactions to children's choice of a partner	65	25	3	8	110

Source: Study 1999

In the following we concentrate on the question in which ambivalences are directly mentioned. Moreover, the frequencies of the strategies permit us to assume that the "solidarity bias" is minimized in this question (26% in Table 10). A *correspondence analysis* helps us to attach central variables to the different strategies.⁴⁰ Since we are interested in general correspondencies, we don't refer to special dyads when making statements about general variables like the quality of a relationship.⁴¹

The correspondence analysis shows that the *solidarity* strategy is predominant in father-son dyads. Generally, solidarity goes together with good dyadic relationships, as well as with good relationships in the family as a whole. Here we find few thoughts on ambivalences and, in contrast, a strong approval of the traditio-

³⁹ We also have to keep in mind that in our sample families with good relationships are probably overrepresented, because the others are not as willing to give interviews about this topic and are more reluctant to provide the addresses of relatives to be interviewed – which was our sampling method.

⁴⁰ For the method and application of correspondence analysis see Greenacre/Blasius (1994).

⁴¹ In order to differentiate the dyads one has to pay attention to the naming of these dyads: The person mentioned first is always the reporting person, the one who refers to the other relative (i.e. father → son dyad).

nal morphology of the family. It is significant that a feeling of being torn seldom occurs and that clear-cut answers dominate in descriptions of both personal and institutional aspects of relationships.

The strategy of *atomization* is predominant in the relationships of sons with their parents. These relationships are characterized by poor quality. The tendency to separate from the parental generation is also supported by a strong opposition to traditional conceptions of the family. A negative evaluation of ambivalences and a low tolerance for ambiguity force decisions in the same direction. On the other hand, high formal education enables these persons to live on their own. Nevertheless, we can identify traces of ambivalence, especially in the institutional dimension.

Captivation is a strategy which can be found above all in relationships between daughters and their parents. These cases are characterized by very poor quality relationships. This seems to be a very clear (even though unfortunate) situation. The fact that this strategy goes along with frequent feelings of being torn points to the relevance of culturally deeply-rooted expectations in respect to good intergenerational relations. Consequently, ambivalences can be identified above all in the personal dimension. The term 'captivation' seems to be well chosen, because these respondents don't care particularly about the topic of ambivalence, which would be a precondition for changing their situation. That's why they are literally captives of their relationships.

Emancipation seems to be a strategy which is linked not so much to aspects of the relationship as to personality traits. Whereas the above-mentioned strategies can be described with two axes of the correspondence analysis (one representing the quality of relationship and the other representing the position within the family), emancipation seems to be related to a third axis.⁴²

⁴² One goal of correspondence analysis is a typology of cases which can be arranged in a multidimensional space. It is in principle possible to describe the chosen management variable (which consists of four answer categories) in a three-dimensional space. The first axis can clearly be described as the quality of relationships, as mentioned above. We can easily identify this dimension as the personal dimension in our heuristic model. Its importance is underlined by the proportion of explained variance: 60.4%. The second dimension is more difficult to interpret, because it corresponds with gender, generation, but also with the quality of relationship. It may refer to the position within the family. The third dimension seems to represent tolerance for ambiguity. Emancipation clearly corresponds with this dimension. It does not contribute to either of the first two axes.

So far, we find a clear distinction between the different strategies. Whereas captivation and atomization go along with poor quality, solidarity corresponds with good relationships. This underlines the major influence of this variable, which we pointed out earlier in this paper. Although some results suggest that atomization and captivation are the preferred strategies in cases of manifest ambivalences, we have no statistical evidence for a general connection between these two variables.

4. Summary and Outlook

The results of our research, and particularly of the 1999 survey can be summarized as follows: Answers by the respondents concerning questions of their relationships, their conduct, their mastering of specific situations can be validly interpreted as indicators of ambivalences. They can be assessed directly and indirectly, and the respondents judge their experiences positively and negatively.

- It is useful to differentiate between two dimensions or kinds of ambivalences, namely 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 (or overt) and latent (or covert) ambivalences. This distinction calls to mind the psychiatric and psychoanalytical roots of the concept.
- Experienced and reported ambivalences differ depending on gender and generation (e.g. between parents and adult children, and types of dyads). In reports of parents we find stronger personal, in reports of adult children we find stronger institutional ambivalences. The mother-son relationship stands out because of the unexpected patterns it displays.
- There seems to be a correlation between the experience of reported ambivalences and the quality of relationships. The interdependence may not be linear. This would be compatible with the understanding of dealing with ambivalence as a "meta-task" in the context of intergenerational relations.
- It is useful to search for different ways of dealing with ambivalences. Based on the dimensions of the proposed model, these types can be characterized under the general labels of solidarity, emancipation, atomization and captivation.

What do these findings have in common with other results? As a general statement one may say that they confirm the plurality of intergenerational relations. They also point to a multiperspectival view of them which is still another expression of ambivalences. Since it was the major goal of this research to operationalize the concept of ambivalence and to work out research procedures to assess it empirically, we cannot, at this moment, given the size of our sample, establish close connections regarding the interdependence of ecological factors and the particular manifestation of ambivalences. This remains a task for future research which may be both study representatively selected populations and use specific case studies.

As shown above, the ambivalence perspective allows for the discovery and the identification of different strategies for coping with them pragmatically. In this way, what may be called solidarity is just one form of coping. Dealing in such a way with plurality avoids possible normative connotations which may be carried in research which takes solidarity as the major point of reference since this concept, within our culture, implies certain value orientations.

In contrast we prefer to regard the conduct of intergenerational relations as an anthropologically given task which must be fulfilled, but which is carried out in different ways. In other words: solidarity is one strategy in dealing with ambivalences. Another way to conceive of this topic may be to call ambivalence pragmatically a meta-task in the conduct of intergenerational relations, in other words, it is a dimension which underlies any concrete action.

In regard to the integration of the study of intergenerational relations into the general realm of social sciences, the concept of ambivalence may be suited to bridge the micro- and macro sociological orientations or what Cohler calls the personal and the social. This is especially appealing, because the very concept of generation points to the interconnection between the phylogenetic and the ontogenetic processes of human development and their social embeddedness.

Our research results also confirm the connection between generation and gender. Both rely on the structural fact and the social experience of polarized differences which ultimately cannot be reconciled and which are always basic for the constitution of identities, both personal and collective. At the same time, they are a source of social inequalities.

The experience of fundamental differences and the challenges they provide both for personal social contact and for societal organization is a dominant feature of contemporary postmodern approaches. Thus the ambivalence perspective lends itself to current developments and interests in societal analysis, and it integrates, in this way, the study of intergenerational relations into current general social theory and research.

Finally, from a practical point of view, it is also important to recall that dealing with ambivalence does not necessarily imply burdens. It may also offer chances for innovation and development, again for both persons and the organization of families and institutions. Thus, the concept of ambivalence, because of its openness and the avoidance of a priori normative connotations, may be well-suited to integrate a theoretical, empirical and practical view of intergenerational relations in families and societies.

A deeper and more differentiated analysis of the modes of dealing with ambivalences is therefore the next research step. This may include the collection of new data using qualitative interviews. Another concern has been suggested by Cohler (see part 2), who recommends exploring the possibilities of obtaining data on the family as a unit or "system". This leads to issues of the connection between ambivalences and group identities. – Turning to the dynamics of personal and societal development, one may also consider combining the ambivalence perspective with the life-course approach. Here again the anthropological conditions of generational belonging and of intergenerational relations may be a strategically well-chosen starting point for a more general theory of the role of ambivalence in human sociality.

Appendix

1. Konstanz Intergenerational Ambivalence Projects

Institution: Research Center "Society and Family", University of Konstanz

Research Team: Kurt Lüscher, Frank Lettke, Sabrina Böhmer, Anette Fintz-Müller, Brigitte Pajung-Bilger

American Associate: Karl Pillemer

Funding: State of Baden-Württemberg, Fritz Thyssen Foundation, TransCoop Program of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

Study 1997 Intergenerational Relations after Divorce
Secondary analysis of semi-structured interviews (N = 103)

Study 1998 Telephone Survey
Screening of familial living arrangements. Random sample of the German population between 25 and 70 years of age registered as having their principal residence in the Konstanz region (N = 528)

Study 1999 Personal Interviews
Quantitative study of intergenerational relations. Sample, selected according to a family typology from respondents of the telephone survey (N = 124: 72 parents and 52 adult children, includes 255 dyads)

Homepage: <http://www.uni-konstanz.de/FuF/SozWiss/fg-soz/ag-fam/famsoz-i.html>

Postal Address: Universität Konstanz, Geisteswissenschaftliche Sektion,
Fachbereich Geschichte und Soziologie, Fach D 33,
D - 78457 Konstanz

2. International Network on Intergenerational Ambivalence

Chair: Kurt Lüscher, Karl Pillemer

Workshops: 1998 Ithaca (USA), 2000 Konstanz (D)

E-mail: Kurt.Lüscher@uni-konstanz.de
kap6@cornell.edu

3. Model of Intergenerational Ambivalence

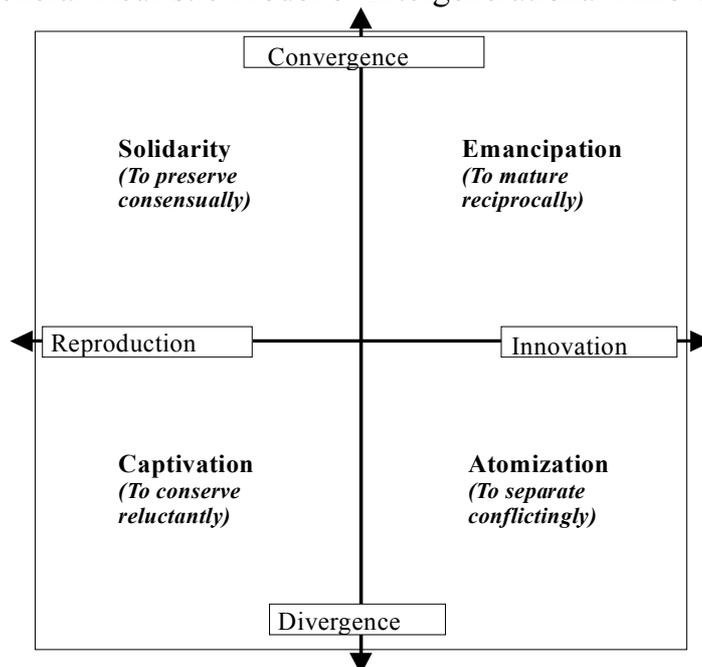
Relationships can be described in terms of *two principal dimensions*, on each of which ambivalences can be observed. The two extremes of each dimension are conceived of as *poles* of a continuum.

Personal dimension (vertical axis in Figure 1): Ambivalences arise from the tension between the poles of 'convergence' and 'divergence', which raises to the question of whether relationships are oriented more to community, proximity and closeness or to difference, separation and distance.

Institutional dimension (horizontal axis): Ambivalences on this dimension are tensions between the poles of 'reproduction' and 'innovation', that is, the question whether relationships are more oriented to confirmation or reinforcement of normative issues or to their modification or variation.

These dimensions can be integrated into the following model.

Figure 1: General Heuristic Model of Intergenerational Ambivalence



In the 1997 study this model emerged as a result of empirical analysis and theoretical considerations, in a strategy of "research in the discovery mode." In the 1999 study the model was conceptually refined; it then served as the reference for the development of a set of research instruments aimed at the "operationalization" of ambivalence. *Four fields* can be distinguished, as shown

in Figure 1, which, on a general (societal) level, represent the *logics of social relations*:

- Field 1: *Solidarity* as the predominance of convergence and reproduction
- Field 2: *Emancipation* as the predominance of convergence and innovation
- Field 3: *Atomization* as the predominance of divergence and innovation
- Field 4: *Captivation* as the predominance of divergence and reproduction

The four logics were derived from narrative interviews which focused on relationships between adult children and their parents after divorce (Lüscher/Pajung-Bilger 1998). As a first step, *patterns of meaning* were identified in the interview transcriptions. These patterns were summarized in *maxims for action*, and a further abstraction specified the *logics of social relations*.

Figure 2: Derivation of the Logics of Social Relations Via Patterns of Meaning and Maxims for Action

Field	Patterns of Meaning	Maxims for Action	Logics of Social Relations
1	to distribute to encourage to protect	to preserve consensually	solidarity
2	to profit to release to support	to mature reciprocally	emancipation
3	to work for to turn aside to exclude	to separate conflictually	atomization
4	to reward to hold to to enmesh	to conserve reluctantly	captivation

In the questionnaire, our operationalization proceeded in the opposite direction: We developed general and context-specific formulations which represented the four logics.

4. Construction of Research Instruments within a Questionnaire

Ambivalence can be characterized as a reflexive construct, i.e., there are several possible ways in which ambivalences can be diagnosed by different persons. For instance, family members can be aware of ambivalence in different relations, but it is also possible that respondents are not aware of them, and only others, such as scientists, have the ability to diagnose them by means of differentiated analysis. For this task we developed the following *instruments*.

- *Assessment* of relationships: People describe their perceptions of different relationships.
- *Awareness* of ambivalence: People tell us about their experienced ambivalence, or we compare utterances containing assessments of relationships with regard to ambivalences.
- *Management*: We asked people to tell us something about the ways in which they handle ambivalences.
- *Society*: Perception of relations between generations in society at large.
- *Family image*: Respondents' views on the "bourgeois image of the family", consisting of morphological aspects and gender-related task distribution.
- *Miscellaneous questions*: These questions yield personality traits and socio-demographic variables which help us to look for general differences in the answers.

For analytical purposes, it is essential to pay attention to the level of societal observation. Intergenerational relations can be viewed as:

- General relations in *society*
- Relations in the own *family*
- Specific (dyadic) *parent-child relationships*

Figure 3 below illustrates the composition of our questionnaire. The numbers indicate the order of questions.

Figure 3: Schema of the Questionnaire

Level of societal observation	Instruments					
	Assessment	Awareness	Management	Society	Family image	Miscellan. questions
Intergenerational relationships in general				1 relationship between young and old 2 changes in this relationship 3/4 perceptions of young and old 5 relationship between young and old	8 morphological aspects 9 gender-related task distribution	6 tolerance for ambiguity 49 quality of questionnaire 50 difficulties in answering 51 character of ambivalence
Own family	7 taboos in family conversation 13 how members relate to one another	15 relationship of the poles of innovation and reproduction 16 relationship of the poles of convergence and divergence	12 maxims for action 14 communication styles		10 quality of family life 11 reasons for differences between ideal family and own experience	52 thoughts on ambivalence 53-61 demography
Parent-child relationships	17 relationship quality (graph.) 24 closeness of the relationship 25 desired relationship 26 positive aspects of relations 27 attributes of the relationship 28 frequency of contact 29/30 desired contacts 31 changes in the past 5 years 32 reasons for changes 33 changes in the future	18 experience of ambivalence, feeling torn 19 stress caused by ambivalence 20 typical situation of ambivalence 21 examples of ambivalence 22 relationship of innovation and reproduction 23 relationship of convergence and divergence	34-41 vignette "financial support" 42-48 vignette "choice of partner"			62 interview-partner in the family 63 question about future contacts

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Part 2

Reconciling the Social and the Personal: Ambivalences and the Multi-Generation Family

Introductory Remarks

The concept of ambivalence presents a paradox for social analysis. Initially developed by Bleuler (1910/1911) as a means of portraying the often conflicting emotions of the schizophrenic patient, it was later expanded by psychoanalysis, beginning with Freud (1912-13, 1914), to refer to simultaneously maintained feelings of love and hate. In a charming essay, Freud (1914) discusses his recollections of his teachers and observes that "... we were from the very first equally inclined to love and to hate them, to criticize and respect them. Psychoanalysis has given the name of 'ambivalence' to this readiness to contradictory attitudes ... [it] is in this existence of contrary feelings side by side that lies the essential character of what we call emotional ambivalence." (p. 242-243) Freud saw the origins of this emotional ambivalence in the young child's conflict regarding wishes inevitably arising sometime in the transition from early to middle-childhood concerning loving and rivalrous ties within the family, metaphorically portrayed by Sophocles in the drama of Oedipus the King.

Abstracting the concept of contrary feelings from their presumed origins in early childhood, Lüscher/Lettke suggest in part 1 more generally that ambivalence refers to "... polarizations of (simultaneous) emotions, thoughts, social relations and structures, which are considered relevant for the constitution of individual and collective identities, and which are (or can be) interpreted as temporarily or permanently irreconcilable." Lüscher further notes that these conflicts must be irresolvable and must be subjectively regarded as such by persons experiencing these states of ambivalence. Over the post-war years, the term was adopted by the social sciences to refer to situations such as role conflict in which persons struggle with conflicting expectations, demands and circumstances (Merton and Barber 1963; Smelser 1998).

Most recently, Kurt Lüscher, Karl Pillemer and the Humboldt TransCoop-Network project have sought to reconcile the personal and the social levels of analysis through the study of ambivalence within the multigeneration family of adulthood in contemporary European and American society. Pauline Boss (1999) has returned to Freud's elaboration of the concept of ambivalence within the family, focusing on the important problem of ambiguous loss in the tradition pioneered by Reuben Hill (1949). Before turning to these studies, it is necessary to consider once again the paradox of linking the personal and the social in social

study in order to appreciate the significance of the work presented in part I as a step in resolving this paradox linking the personal and the social. In the present instance, the paradox is even greater since ambivalence is a term founded in psychoanalysis which presumes that individual motivation provides an explanation for social life (Freud 1912-13).

1. Individual and Society

The problem of relating the individual and the social was one which concerned a number of social theorists seeking to understand the complexity of social life with the emergence of modernity at the beginning of the Twentieth Century (Freud 1912-13; Simmel 1908; Durkheim 1895/1901). Durkheim's concept of "social fact" remains one of the central and cautionary concepts in the study of social life. Often quoted as a foundation for the study of social life, Durkheim focuses on the concept of constraint and its origins within the group. Seeking to clarify this concept in the preface to the second edition of the *Rules of the Sociological Method*, Durkheim (1901) observes that:

"Social facts differ not only in quality from psychical facts: they have a different substratum, they do not evolve in the same environment or depend on the same conditions. This does not mean that they are not in some sense psychical, since they all consist of ways of thinking and acting. But the states of the collective consciousness are of a different nature from the states of the individual consciousness: they are representations of another kind. The mentality of the group is not that of individuals: it has its own laws." (p. 40)

Durkheim states that the concept of social life cannot be explained by purely psychological factors. At the same time, personal and collective ideas are inter-related. As Gilbert (1989) affirmed in commenting on Durkheim's observations in his preface to the Second Edition, participation in social life assumes that persons acting in concert are able to experience and represent for themselves constraints present in social life. However, in their origin, while these constraints lie outside of the category of the personal, members of the society assume shared understanding of these constraints in order to make possible group life. That is to say, it is through socialization that members of a society come to understand normative constraint which makes possible social action. Giddens (1993) notes further that these social facts are represented in practice which, in turn, shapes the individual. Considering the problem of which came first, the collective or the personal, Durkheim maintains that shared understandings define personal

realities and should be appreciated as distinctive in contrast to personal dispositions. As he comments (1901):

"... in order for a social fact to exist, several individuals at the very least must have interacted together and the resulting combination must have given rise to some new production. As this synthesis occurs outside each one of us ... it has necessarily the effect of crystallizing, of instituting outside ourselves, certain modes of action and certain ways of judging which are independent of the particular individual." (p. 45)

Central to this concept of a social fact is the notion of "social constraint", ways of acting and thinking possessing a reality outside of persons and determining their beliefs and actions. Particular beliefs and practices in particular realms of social life constitute institutions; the family is clearly one such institution. Individual family members share certain beliefs such as reciprocity and interconnectedness in common; actions are constrained by these beliefs. However, it must be emphasized that particular constraints are shaped by both historical factors and shared values and ethos or ways of living. The social sciences continue to find social change difficult to understand. Those adhering to concepts of "family value" view the contemporary modified extended family of Western Bourgeois culture in terms of some never changing concept of patriarchy, composition, and structure which, if it ever existed, has long since been transformed into a reconstituted family, or a "family of choice", perhaps best defined as those with whom one shares the Thanksgiving dinner (Weston 1991).

At the same time, while there may be change over time in some aspects of constraints agreed upon by family members, some concept of constraint is shared by those identifying as family members (Simmel, 1908). Simmel recognizes a category of personal attributes, although not locating the origin of these personal attributes other than in society. He suggests that there is a tension between these personal attributes and social life.

Perhaps the most thoughtful consideration of this issue of the relationship of the personal and the social is posed in Chodorow's (1999) discussion, which extends Simmel's observation that there is something personal apart from the social which nevertheless partakes of the social. Chodorow proposes an understanding of social life as shaped by changing historical features, local, often contested understandings of particular constraints. Lives may be understood as the intersection between particular life circumstances leading to particular thoughts

and intentions – a so-called internal world – and the consequence of living within such constraints or norms as gender, age, social status, and so forth. The experience of living with others, from the first relationships within the nuclear family to an ever expanding circle of friends and relatives forms an integrated narrative of lived experience. Shared understandings of self, other, and feeling, also enter into the expression of this narrative, yet there remains a realm of personal meaning which cannot simply be reduced to the social. Wishes and feelings are as much personal as social, and must be appreciated as such. The realm of the social provides the template for particular meanings of self and other, not because of some universality, but because of coincidence with the meanings which we attribute to our own lived experience. In the *Savage Mind*, Levi-Strauss (1966) portrays the process of meaning making to the activity of the "handy-man" or "jack-of-all-trades." Making use of the stock of available shared understandings, we select those which fit with particular experience. As Chodorow (1999) observes:

"Self and feeling, and meaning in general, are inextricably cultural and personal. An adequate conception of culture and cultural meaning should also include an account of historicized, biographical, intrapsychic meaning; people obtain meaning and order not only from culture and social structure but also from their own psychological capacities to accord personal meaning, to experience conflict, to create and live in an internal world of fantasy. Each of us creates psychological meaning throughout life ... people avail themselves of cultural meanings and images, but they animate and create them through unconscious fantasy processes ... in accordance with their own unique biography or history of intrapsychic and interpersonal strategies and practices." (pps. 173-174)

2. Linking the Personal and the Social: Ambivalence and Intergenerational Ties

Ambivalence, understood as the simultaneous experience of necessarily conflicting attitudes, wishes, feelings, or intentions, has a twisted history in both psychological and social analysis. Kurt Lüscher (2000) has provided an important historical survey of this concept as founded first in the study of abnormal states, and then generalized to the usual and expectable in social life. It should be noted at the outset that there is a problem even beyond the level of analysis in transforming a concept of the abnormal into one of the normal. However, as used by Freud, this distinction between abnormal and normal disappears. At the same time, Freud further compounds problems in understanding this important concept since for him, the social is but the personal

written large. In this sense, Freud poses in the opposite direction the problem posed by Durkheim, in this case generalizing from the personal to the social rather than from the social to the personal. If for Durkheim the concept of social constraint could be studied apart from its experience for particular persons, for Freud, the concept of ambivalence can be studied apart from its collective representation.

Understood in terms of contemporary social analysis, the concept of ambivalence was introduced into social study by Merton and Barber (1976), who explained that:

"In its most extended sense, sociological ambivalence refers to incompatible normative expectations of attitudes, beliefs and behavior assigned to a status (i.e. social position) or to a set of statuses in a society. In its most restricted sense, sociological ambivalence refers to incompatible normative expectations incorporated in a single role of a single social status ... In both the most extended and the most restricted sense, the ambivalence is located in the social definition of roles and statuses, not in the feeling-state of one or another type of personality." (p. 6f.)

In their discussion of sociological ambivalence as "incompatible normative expectations of attitudes, beliefs, and behavior assigned to a status (i.e. social position) or to a set of statuses in a society," Merton and Barber maintain that the social analysis of ambivalence should focus on the circumstances created by the social structure in which ambivalence is embedded. Their concern is with the structural context within which personal ambivalence arises. For example, the role conflict, strain, and overload so often reported by the parents of school-aged children represents one form of ambivalence created by social position or structure. The struggle of parents of school-aged children, attempting at the same time to satisfy the demands of both career and parenthood, getting kids to soccer practice or helping with a school field-trip, while managing to be available to a corporate client, is but one example of role conflict or ambivalence created by family structure and played out within the family.

Educated both in social theory and research and also in psychoanalysis, Smelser (1998) has suggested that this distinction between ambivalence at the level of personal motivation and at the level of social position may be more difficult to maintain than Merton and Barber (1963) had claimed. Reviewing the concept of ambivalence within Freud's initial formulation, Smelser suggests that ambivalent personal motivation is particularly powerful, leading to challenge to present

personal adaptation and requiring protection against an awareness of the intense feelings evoked. Study of the family provides an ideal context for integrating the focus on ambivalence at the level of social position posed by Merton and Barber (1963) and Smelser (1998).

It is precisely the significance of the family as the source of all feelings of love and care which leads to strong feelings of solidarity and concern across a lifetime, but which also leads to concern with what is the presumed, appropriate psychological experience of care and solidarity and also appropriate social ties (Cohler, 1983; Pruchno, Blow and Smyer, 1984). Smelser (1998) suggests that situations emphasizing dependence, commitment, and loyalty breed ambivalence in such diverse social settings as family and work place. Smelser emphasizes the constraint common to this demand for loyalty in family or workplace as a source of ambivalence.

Viewed in terms of intergenerational relations within the family of adulthood, such continuing young-adult emotional dependence might best be understood as interdependence as family members continue to struggle to reconcile conflicting cultural demands between dependence and concern with those emphasizing personal autonomy and independence from others. However, consistent with the observations of Stierlin (1974) regarding variations in patterns of emotional separation, which are more or less adaptive among adolescents and young adults and their parents, Frank, Laman and Avery (1988) suggest that emotional autonomy and the experience of connectedness-separation might be separate dimensions of emotional ties within the family.

Emotional autonomy is closely associated among young adults with the capacity for maintaining a firm sense of the self as separate and vigorous, even in the physical absence of the supportive caregivers of early childhood and their approval or disapproval (Boss 1967). Connectedness and separation was understood by these young-adult offspring as the capacity for maintaining an empathic and mutually satisfying relationship with middle-aged and older parents. Consistent with this shared value on autonomy, reviewing recent literature on adult child-parent relationships, Lye (1996) has concluded that "adult offspring and parents define their obligations to each other in a manner which is supportive of individual independence and that in this way norms of obligation are reconciled with norms of independence." (p. 97)

The reality is that family life presumes what Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) have termed "invisible loyalties" which conflict with shared value on self-provision (Ewing 1990, 1991). In a culture in which the "Marlboro Man" is the icon, alone with his horse, silhouetted against the sun setting over the distant mountains, the notion that one might need or depend upon other family members becomes a source of ambivalence. This ambivalence, the consequence of what Weber (1904-05) had portrayed as the ethos of Calvinist Protestantism, is in striking contrast with the diary entry of a Rajput nobleman that family is everything and the source of continuing identity in adulthood (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1980).

Lüscher and Pillemer (1998) suggest that this concept of ambivalence includes portrayal of both solidarity and conflict in relations among family members. At the same time, as Parsons (1955) has observed, the child's social position within the family (generation and gender), provides the social context within which individual experience of ambivalence first arises in the preschool epoch. Focus on ambivalence experienced within the family provides perhaps the "ideal type" (Weber 1904-05, p. 74) for studying the intersection of the personal and the social. Lüscher and Pillemer (1998) note that within the family we are able to see norms in action. Within the family we may observe the intersection between the lived personal experience of particular family members representing what Hagestad (1981, 1986) has portrayed as the intersect of personal, family, and social time or the lived experience of family members representing generation and cohort.

Ambivalence as a concept arises within the family as a consequence of the child's experience of wishes conflicting with socially determined constraints regarding the expression of these wishes. However, constraints are understood both in terms of this biographical encounter and also in terms of those learned, shared, constraints acting upon the expression of intent and desire. These structural constraints arise both from the generation within the family (Parsons, 1955), but also, more generally, from those structural constraints reflected in the norms related to gender, age, social prestige, which change over time together with the changing historical and social context through which particular lives are fashioned. The ambivalence felt by parents of the last college-bound child, leading to realization of the "empty nest," reflects just this ambivalence as parents are constrained to reshape interdependency within the family to

recognize the inevitability of their children's physical absence from home for protracted periods of time (or, equally likely, "for good").

Lüscher (2000, see also Lüscher/Pajung-Bilger 1998) has proposed a two-dimensional model of the family of adulthood with two poles reflecting the structural dimensions of reproduction and innovation, and convergence-divergence. A four-fold table yields four strategies of dealing with ambivalence, solidarity, reflecting consensus, emancipation, reflecting mature interdependence, captivation or the effort to hold the now adult offspring within the family through techniques referred to by Stierlin (1974) as delegation and binding, and atomization, in which the intergenerational family becomes fragmented. The Konstanz research group has systematically explored these four types in the research which they have presented in part 1.

In the paper by Lüscher and Lettke, much of the emphasis is upon ambivalence as a structural attribute referring to "human sociability." Important in this discussion, and so clearly evident in aging Western societies, is the issue of transfer payments to seniors, presumably at the expense of younger generations (of course forgetting that assistance for seniors reduces demands on their offspring). For Lüscher and Lettke, ambivalence is evident if contradictions in role conflict, strain, and overload are evident in role identities (McCall and Simmons 1978). Lüscher and Lettke have focused on the family of adulthood, with particular interest in older parents, as their focus of study. Parent-son relationships are a particular focus of interest, with less structural ambivalence regarding the role of son than regarding that of daughter.

Boxer, Cook and Cohler (1986) have shown that the ties between men across three generations within the family are particularly salient for each generation in the male lineage. Some conflict, particularly regarding life-style, was apparent across the generations, but men in each of the three generations did not perceive conflict in the same manner. Issue regarding occupation were the most frequently discussed issue, but also the greatest source of disagreement among men within the three generations of the family. The son may be a source of support for older parents, at least of instrumental as contrasted with expressive support (Parsons 1955); the possibility of dependence upon the son for such support, particularly among mothers anticipating at some point widowhood and needing this assistance, may lead away from acceptance of ambivalence. As Lüscher and

Lettke observe, solidarity is an important strategy for dealing with ambivalence, and the son can maximize this solidarity through "intimacy at a distance" (Rosenmayr and Koeckis 1983).

Further, structurally, daughters may remain interdependent to a greater extent than sons who early realize career aspirations and move out of the household. Where ambivalence appears in the son's relationship with his parents, it is in the realm of conflictual separations. Solidarity-atomization appears to be the dimension along which the parent-son relationship is constructed, while understandably in terms of the daughter's role as the mother of the next generation, the struggle over conflicted inter-generational ties, particularly that of daughter and mother, is salient. The increasing number of books regarding the mother-daughter relationship across the course of life is a testimony to this inevitable structural ambivalence between mother and daughter (Cohler, 1987/88).

3. Ambivalence both Personal and Structural: The Issue of Loss and Mourning

Issues of grief and loss are among the most powerful across the course of life. It was Freud's singular genius to attempt an understanding of the manner in which we seek to resolve feelings of grief. Freud recognized mourning as salient not just in the death of a loved one, but also in the reaction to social and historical change. The manner in which we deal with loss requires understanding of both personal and collective actions. Young (1988, 2000) has written of the effort to grieve and put to rest the tragedies of the Third Reich through construction of public monuments. Sturken (1997) and Homans (2000) have discussed the construction of the Vietnam memorial in Washington as a similar effort to grieve loss (see also Lin 2000 and the discussion of her response to the problem of ambiguous loss as she designed this memorial). Sturken (1997) and Odets (1995) also discuss the construction of the quilt in memory of the often early and so often early off-time and painful death of persons with AIDS.

4. Conclusion

The concept of contradictory feelings or ambivalence is of considerable interest in understanding the dynamics of social life. However, the basis of this concept has been in the study of personal psychopathology. A double move is required to portray the concept of ambivalence as an ordinary and expectable aspect of social life and then to find a means for representing the concept of contradictory feelings as a social construct rather than one based on individual differences and personality attributes. Pioneering study of ambivalence at the level of personal lived experience has been extended by sociology to include aspects of social life. The study of ambivalence within the family provides one such opportunity; another opportunity is provided by the study of such culturally salient representations as monuments and texts. Central to this concept is an emphasis upon contradictory feelings and attitudes which are difficult to reconcile, experienced by persons within a social order who are able to portray their experiences, and represented through communication and ritual. Freud had believed that the family as an intergenerational unit inevitably created these irreconcilable attitudes due to the nature of the young child's wish which echoes across a lifetime in subsequent life experiences. Sociology has pointed to the continuing nature of this ambivalence within particular dyads and lineages within the family.

Lüscher/Lettke (part 1) and Boss/Kaplan (2000) provide evidence not only regarding the importance of this concept for the study of family relations, but also regarding the continuing problems of trying to relate the personal to the social in the study of ambivalence. Extending earlier work by Merton and Smelser in creative new directions, Lüscher and Lettke have provided evidence of contradictory feelings inherent in particular dyads within the family, such as that of mother and daughter, which helps us understand the reasons for the unusually large number of books related to this dyad which have been published over the past several decades. The relationship of parents and sons is less structurally ambivalent than that of fathers and daughters. Boss and Kaplan (2000) highlight the significance of contradictory feelings within the family for personal well being. Coming from family therapy, Boss' work is less structural and more personal. However, the study of care-giver responses to Alzheimer's Disease provides yet another opportunity for putting the personal and the social or structural dimensions of contradictory feelings together.

Two of the more central tasks remaining in the study of ambivalence within the family are the more explicit inclusion of both personal and social dimensions in family study, taking advantage of ties across three or more generations within the family, and representing these conflicting feelings not just at the dyadic lineage levels, but also in terms of the whole family as Burgess (1926) did. In his study of families during the Second World War where the husband-father served in the military, Reuben Hill (1949) attempted such a study. His analysis included both the structural problems posed for other relatives with the husband and father off at war, the issue of ambiguous loss, never knowing whether the family member serving in the war was safe, and the problems of resolving contradictory feelings upon the return of the husband and father. Recall that reunion proved to be a more difficult task for the family than departure. Hill's pioneering research should inspire us to seek study of the impact of contradictory feelings upon the whole family with regard for the concerns of each member of the family.

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