Kurt Lüscher[1]

A Heuristic Model for the Study of Intergenerational Ambivalence[2]

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In recent years intergenerational relations have received increasing attention because of demographic transformations and changes in family life styles. Overwhelmed by the richness of the data, several authors of recent research reviews have pointed to the need for more theoretical work. The following presentation is intended to contribute to the search for new conceptual orientations. It is based on a general heuristic hypothesis: Intergenerational relations imply and generate ambivalences.

It is conceived as a contribution to "research in the discovery mode". Thus, it starts with a conceptual exploration of the sociological dimensions of the concept of "generation", followed by an exploration of the meanings of "ambivalence". The general heuristic hypothesis is formulated before this background. Its fruitfulness is demonstrated by a review of recent research, followed by an exposition of a model which allows to distinguish basic ways of dealing with integenerational ambivalences. Finally, a brief reference is made to the embeddedness of this approach in contemporary societal analysis.

Zusammenfassung

Der folgende Text ist eine leicht überarbeitete Fassung eines Gast-Vortrages, der im Rahmen der 15. Zweijahres-Konferenz der International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development, 1998 gehalten worden ist. Darin wird das im Rahmen einer Sekundäranalyse des Projektes "Generationenbeziehungen unter Erwachsenen nach einer Scheidung in mittleren Lebensphasen" entwickelte heuristische Modell der Ambivalenz von Generationenbeziehungen vorgestellt. Zu diesem Zweck werden - in Anlehnung an die Leitidee von "research in the discovery mode" - die über den alltagssprachlichen Gebrauch hinausreichenden inhaltlichen Dimensionen der beiden Konzepte "Generation" und Ambivalenz" herausgearbeitet und aufeinander bezogen. Daraus wird - unter Berücksichtigung von handlungstheoretischen Überlegungen - die zentrale heuristische Hypothese abgeleitet, wonach Generationenbeziehungen Ambivalenzen sowohl beinhalten als auch bedingen. Diese Annahme wird dann am Beispiel der Forschungsliteratur diskutiert und im Rahmen des Modelles ausdifferenziert. Abschliessend wird ein kurzer zeitdiagnostischer Ausblick vorgenommen. (Eine ausführliche deutschsprachige Darstellung des Modelles findet sich in Lüscher/Pajung 1998.)

1. Introduction

My presentation will be organized around the idea that we should analyze inter-generational relations under the general postulate that they imply and generate ambivalences. This is not a new idea. On the contrary: It can be traced back to ancient times. It is also implicit in many research findings, even though the concept of ambivalence may not be mentioned at all. For example, Youniss, in an article on "adolescent interpersonal relationships in social context", writes: "In summary, we can conceptualize contemporary parent-adolescent relationships as involving both a movement toward separateness prior to adulthood and a simultaneous pull to remain connected to those persons one has come to love and on whom one has relied. This means that during adolescence there must be a considerable amount of parent-adolescent negotiation of a complex sort, such that adolescents can form views separate from those of their parents and yet, at the same time, make clear and justify these views to their parents. On the other side, parents need to permit adolescents freedom to separate themselves, while at the same time communicating and reinforcing parental values and perspectives." (1989: 303) However, if I am not mistaken, the connection between ambivalence and intergenerational relations has still not been systematically explored.

Yet, in recent years intergenerational relations have received increasing attention because of demographic transformations and changes in family life styles. This is documented in numerous empirical studies. Overwhelmed by the richness of the data, several authors of research reviews have pointed to the need for more theoretical work. For instance, Lye (1996: 76) states lapidarily: "The most pressing need for future research is the development of new theoretical formulations."

This is my point of departure,whereby I draw on work which I did together with Karl Pillemer (Bronfenbrenner Life Course Institute) and Brigitte Pajung-Bilger. It could be assigned to the tradition of the search for "theories of the middle range". Robert K. Merton (1957: 9), whose own work with the concept of ambivalence illustrates this way of theorizing, will be discussed below. Our approach is also related to ideas which Urie Bronfenbrenner calls "research in the discovery mode" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 1998: 999-1001, and personal communication. See also Lüscher 1995).

An important feature of our research strategy is the careful probing of meanings of the key concepts in the context of theories-at-large. This is especially appropriate in the case of a term - like generations - which is also used in everyday language. I shall argue that the social and temporal dimensions of the concept of generation and the phenomena to which it refers already imply ambivalences. This idea will be further illuminated by a brief discussion of the way this concept can be used for purposes of sociological analysis. Based on these considerations, it is possible to both reinterpret existing research findings and to conceptualize future research. Against this background, and with reference to an exploratory study on intergenerational relations after divorce, I shall present a heuristic model of intergenerational ambivalence. I shall end with a brief reference to the importance of the topic for an analysis of contemporary society. In this way, it can be shown that work in the perspective of "middle range theories" consists in a triangulation of general theory, empirical reality, and pragmatically oriented research. Hence this approach is also well suited for trans-disciplinary cooperation.

2. Premises

2.1 Generations

The concept of generation contains both an institutional dimension and an inter-subjective dimension which are often mingled in research. Also relevant are its temporal connotations. In order to illuminate these aspects I will start by recalling that the social organization of reliable relations between the young and the old is a task which humans have always had to fulfill. After birth, human offspring require a period of intensive personal care lasting several years. Together with the ability to act consciously and to learn, this is the core of any institutionalization of intergenerational relations. These relations must be continously reinterpreted and reorganized, depending on changes in the environment and societal conditions, as well as on changes in knowledge and beliefs about their core meanings. In regard to the institutional dimension two aspects are especially relevant:
- Intergenerational relations outlast the phase which is biologically absolutely necessary, that is at least the first six to eight years of life. Intergenerational relations may continue for the remaining common life-time of the persons involved. This is a <u>primary</u> potential for their <u>institutionalization</u>.

- The immediate interactions between parents and their children can be conceived of as links in a chain of generations. This encourages a transcendental comprehension which is a <u>secondary</u> potential for <u>institutionalization</u>.

In many cultures these two factors have endowed intergenerational relations with an aura of indissolubility and given rise to normative dependencies which - as I shall show - are an essential reason for <u>ambivalences</u>.

Intergenerational relations also have a <u>behavioristic-subjective</u> component. The reason for this is the intimacy of contacts, a psychological closeness that may be attributed to biological roots. This is a point which has been referred to in the debates on "family transcendence", for instance by Berscheid (1996). In any case, the intensity of learning from each other creates a closeness which extends over the whole life course, as confirmed by works on attachment. This closeness also contains tendencies for <u>ambivalences</u>.

The temporal implications are at the core of Karl Mannheim's essay on the problem of generations, which is considered as a major, if not the most important reference in the social sciences. To put it simply: generations constitute themselves because individuals of the same age experience important events in a similar way. This can be easily demonstrated in the case of societal generations. To speak of the generation of the 68ers is an example, although it must be added that its meaning in Europe and in the USA is different, which demonstrates that experiences and interpretations are context-related.

In the case of generations within the family, this reference is somewhat less obvious. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Mannheim was concerned with neither familial with generations nor, by the way, with generational <u>relations</u>. However, it is plausible to think of the siblings in a family as an age group sharing everyday experiences in approximately the same way and unlike their parents. The single child or the single parent are extreme cases which can be subsumed under the general model. Yet families themselves are embedded in meso- and microsystems which all have their own temporal organizations. The concept of generation implies complex temporal connections. The sociology of the life course, and especially the work of Glen Elder, demonstrates this in an impressive way.

In order to approach the concept of ambivalence I would like to point out another aspect, namely that within a biography or a history the references to a specific event or to specific conditions are similar for one generation and fundamentally distinct for the other. This fundamental difference between the generations cannot be overcome. No matter how much parents and children are bound to each other throughout their lives and experiences, the latter can never become completely identical to the former. Thus, not only are family relations formally indissoluble, they are also characterized by this fundamental difference. Pragmatically speaking: in generational relations, experiences and identities may be juxtaposed to each other.

We encounter a fundamental difference here, and we may ask, given the importance of generations for societal integration, whether this difference should not be seen in a connection which has been very much debated in recent philosophical discourses under the notion of "différance". This literature, in turn, assigns a key importance to ambivalence, at least in the writings of Bauman, Derrida, and Lyotard.

To summarize, we may say that the analysis of intergenerational relations must account for two dimensions, namely an interpersonal dimension and an institutional one; furthermore, they display a complex temporal structure. This is expressed in Pinder's famous dictum of the "Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen", ("contemporaneity of the non-contemporary") and in the etymology of the word "generations", as the word refers not only to "procreation", but also to descent from an ancestor. New life is procreated, and at the same time the individual is assigned a societal position. Thus, under general theoretical premises several aspects or dimensions can be mentioned which refer to potential ambivalences in intergenerational relations. But what precisely are the connotations of this concept?

2.2 Ambivalence

Ambivalence is also a term used in everyday language, at least in more sophisticated usage. It designates dilemmas and inner conflicts, especially with regard to emotions. These two components are alluded in the two sources of the word, namely "ambi", signifying two, and "valence", signifying values. Many texts in

the social sciences use the term specifically in this broad, common-sense meaning.

The beginnings of a precise, analytical circumscription can be attributed to Bleuler (1911). In his psychiatric diagnostics, embeddedness or captivity in an ambivalence of <u>will</u>, of <u>thought</u> and of <u>emotion</u> is considered a distinctive symptom of schizophrenia. Of special relevance for our topic is here the reference to the constitution of personal <u>identity</u>. Also, the negative connotation should be noted, which recedes later in the psychiatric literature, insofar as coping with ambivalence is considered an important achievement of the individual. This is especially the case in psychoanalytically oriented family therapy, and this pragmatic mastering of ambivalences, rather than the diagnosis of pathology, is the meaning which is of interest for generational research.

Freud used the concept with at least <u>three</u> different connotations, namely in regard to parent-child-relations, in regard to relations between therapist and patient, and in regard to cultural analysis. Thus the concept is not limited to merely describing inner psychic attitudes and processes.

In the mid-sixties a sociological reception was initiated by a group of scholars led by Merton, Barber and Coser. They demonstrated the usefulness of the concept for the analysis of social roles and role conflicts, as well as for organizational analysis and the understanding of the dilemmas in the professions, especially those of physicians. The work of Lewis Coser demonstrates, in addition, an affinity to conflict theory in sociology. This merits attention, because it indicates that the use of the concept may be bound to paradigmatic choices.

A new interest can be observed in the nineties, the leading author being Zygmut Bauman in writings which are 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 under the primacy of rationality and using the postulate of rational choice. Thus he is refer-

ring to the paradigmatic relevance of the usage of the concept. Further, and in a way very compatible with our proposal to use the concept in regard to intergenerational 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." (8)

For research purposes, different notions or types of ambivalence should be distinguished, as proposed for instance by Hajda (1968: 23):

"- <u>Biological ambivalence</u> refers to the simultaneous presence of opposing drives or instincts in the human organism.
- <u>Psychological ambivalence</u> can be conceived of as an experience of unstable duality of feelings, simultaneous calling forth of counter-emotions, inability to overcome counter-feelings or contradictory evaluation of the same object of attachment.
- <u>Social or structural</u> <u>ambivalence</u> is, first, an expression of man's duality as an individual and a social being. Secondly, it is a manifestation of the simultaneous independence and interdependence of social relations, roles and statuses, and the multiple loyalties, conflicts, and cross-pressures thereby created.
- <u>Cultural ambivalence</u> represents an inherent tension between the inner experience of attachment to values and an outward expression of this experience in a socially and normatively patterned way...."

Each of these meanings may have some bearing on the "problem of generations". Or, to state it from a different angle: In using the concept of ambivalence for the study of intergenerational relations we may be encouraged or sensitized to view the topic as radiating into different disciplines and even raising issues of epistemological relevance.

However, for practical purposes a precise <u>definition</u> is needed, and I suggest we phrase it in the following way:

<u>Definition</u>: We speak of ambivalence in a social science perspective when dilemmas and polarizations of feelings, thoughts, actions and, furthermore, contradictions in social relations and social structures, which are relevant for personal and societal development, are interpreted as in principle irresolvable.

This definition contains three key elements:

(1) Ambivalences <u>presuppose</u> <u>contradictions</u> and <u>conflicts</u>. But this is <u>not</u> sufficient. They must be viewed as polarized and <u>irresolvable</u>.

(2) This irresolvability must be <u>diagnosed</u> by agents and their interpretations.

(3) <u>Agents</u> of interpretations can be the acting persons themselves, third parties such as therapists, or the bearers of scientific analysis.

In regard to recent theories of action and structuration and the analysis of <u>agency</u>, one should add that ambivalences are inherent in social, cultural, and psychological structures, and in this way they can be diagnosed as pre-conditions ex ante for action. However, <u>actions</u> can also be interpreted as the consequences of dealing with ambivalences. In terms of research this means that ambivalence can be both a dependent and an independent variable. More precisely, it should be emphasized: ambivalence, as defined here, is a <u>second order construct</u> denoting not behavior as such, but rather the interpretation of relations in social contexts. It is itself the interpretation of an interpretation.

Based on this considcerations I suggest that we integrate ambivalence within a <u>general heuristic hypothesis</u> which reads as follows: <u>Intergenerational relations imply and generate ambivalences</u>. This proposition is based on the etymology and the history of the term 'generations' and on social anthropological considerations. It also takes into account the present state of research on intergenerational relations. As a general heuristic hypothesis it should provide a frame of orientation which allows us to take into account partially contradictory findings and to include them in a general theoretical orientation, as called for by Lye (op. cit.) when she stated that the most pressing need for future research is the development of new theoretical formulations.

3. The ambivalence of intergenerational relations: Research findings

Starting from this position it seems appropriate to take into account - first - the inherent contradictions of intergenerational relations, and also to be aware of - secondly - the two basic dimensions, namely the intersubjective and institutional dimensions of intergenerational relations. I would like to illustrate the importance

of these components with reference to the overall picture, as found in research in general, in a series of studies which Karl Pillemer and I have reinterpreted.[3]

Perhaps the most popular organizing framework for understanding family relationships in later life is that which highlights intergenerational <u>solidarity</u>. Research within this framework typically assumes that individuals' personal feelings--such as affection, attraction, and warmth--serve to maintain cohesion in the family system (Sprey, 1991). Marshall, Matthews & Rosenthal (1993) note that even the term "solidarity" indicates an emphasis on consensus. European writers have echoed this sentiment, noting the value-laden origins of the term in proletarian movements and in religious social doctrine (Kleine, 1992; Lüscher, 1996). As Roberts et al. (1991) point out, solidarity "has been treated as the engine driving the pursuit of the common good within families" (12). Negative aspects of family life are typically interpreted in this view as an absence of solidarity. Research in this tradition has tended to emphasize shared values across generations, normative obligations to provide help, and enduring ties between parents and children.

However, at the same time as scholars in the solidarity tradition have emphasized mutual support and value consensus, another line of research has focused on isolation, caregiver stress, family problems, conflict, and abuse (Marshall et al., 1993). The image of weakened family ties and the abandonment of the elderly continues to strongly influence public opinion and the portrayal of the family in contemporary fiction and theater. Thus, some scholars, as well as the general public, appear unwilling to accept the notion that intergenerational relationships are solidary and characterized by shared values and reciprocal help. As Marshall and colleagues (1993) have succinctly put it, "the substantive preoccupations in gerontology over the past 30 years point to a love-hate relationship with the family" (p. 47).

If these research results, which taken as a whole appear contradictory, are viewed from the perspective of ambivalence, they can in fact be interpreted as highly compatible. This is also true for specific findings like the following: Bawin-Legros (1995 - interestingly enough entitled: "The limits of family solidarity") did a study of how close together adult children and their parents lived and what

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[3] The following paragraphes draws partially on Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998.

impact geographical closeness had on the quality of their relations. She discovered that working class adults live closer to their parents than middle classes adult children. Yet paradoxically the former, although living closer, had fewer contacts. The key to this surprising result was found in qualitative interviews. They showed that lower class families had a bi-modal pattern of intergenerational relations. Some had very intensive contacts, but others had practically broken off their relations because of serious tensions. Generally speaking, correlational studies do not uncover these adverse tendencies and suggest a unilinear interdependence between proximity and the quality of relations. This observation leads to the insight that the potential ambivalence of intergenerational relations may go unnoticed for methodological reasons.

Specifically, the types of measures employed by researchers in the solidarity tradition are not adequate to address the more complex nature of the questions raised by intergenerational ambivalence. The most commonly used measures in such studies make it impossible to explore contradictory feelings within the same relationship. In research by Bengtson and colleagues, for example, "affectual solidarity" is measured by scales of "the type and degree of positive sentiments held about family members" (Roberts, Richards & Bengtson, 1991). In a recent study, Bengtson and Harootyan (1994) took an even more minimalist approach, operationalizing affectual solidarity using the single measure, "In general, how close do you feel to your [relative]?," with three response categories ("very close," somewhat close," and "not at all close")." Such measures are not likely to reflect the full range of members' contradictory feelings about one another.

Similarly, Rossi & Rossi (1990) employ a scale to measure affectual solidarity that asks respondents to rate relationships on a 1-7 scale. The low end of the scale represents relationships that are "tense and strained," and the high end those that are "close and intimate." This measure, of course, does not allow the study to capture those persons who feel both ways (Marshall et al., 1993). As Mangen (1995) notes, the positive bias in measures like these cannot account for families who score high on both positive and negative dimensions. To address such shortcomings, researchers should begin to include measures of conflicting interpretations of relationships.

I am aware that this is more easily said than done. Methodologically, it is difficult to operationalize ambivalence. As a review of the literature makes obvious,

there are numerous studies containing suggestions and proposals for the measurement of ambivalence, and interest has been growing recently. The following phenomena are chiefly under consideration:
- Racial relations (Katz & Hass, 1988; Alvarez & Brehm, 1997)
- Sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996)
- Close relationships (Thompson & Holmes, 1996)
- Attitudes (Priester & Petty, 1996; Kaplan, 1972)

In this undertaking the following difficulties arise and are discussed:
- <u>Bi-polar</u> scales encourage responses which express a compromise and do not really represent the realm of the dilemmas people experience and are aware of.
- As an alternative, one may consider presenting a <u>monopolar</u> scale which allows for different degrees of acceptance of one side of an ambivalent statement. Subsequently, judgments are solicited concerning the other side. Respondents may respond to the second scale in a way dognitifely consistent with the first. However, this risk may be partially avoided by separating the two scales in the questionnaire.
- It is difficult to separate the judgment of <u>relationships</u> from the judgment of <u>persons</u>.
- The <u>two-dimensionality of agency</u> can cause a confusion of the views of relations before and after social action.

Given the present state of the field, a fruitful strategy with which to empirically approach ambivalence may consist in the combined use of different methods by means of triangulation. This is what has been done in regard to our topic, intergenerational relations, by Cohler & Grunebaum (1981). In their study they used methods which could be applied to the analysis of ambivalence: repeated in-depth interviews over time, semi-structured questionnaires, observation of parents and children, and clinical techniques such as projective tests. Four families were purposely selected from a larger survey, which allowed for comparisons between the case studies and a more representative group. The families were also selected according to theoretically-defined criteria: joint versus separate living arrangements, and high or low scores on a measure of the appropriateness of the mother's attitude toward closeness to the adult child. This type of approach is likely to reveal the complexity of family life implied by the intergenerational ambivalence perspective.

From my point of view, this study, as impressive as it is, suffers from a lack of distinction between the interpersonal and the institutional dimensions of intergenerational relations. This is also true for an important project done in Geneva. Here, Coenen-Huther et al. (1994) did a survey of the relations among kin in a representative sample of families. They discovered that a majority of relations, approximately 60%, were experienced and judged positively. However, one third (36%) referred to ambivalences, and a small minority (4%) judged their relationships negatively. More interestingly, the intensity of dilemmas rose with the frequency of mutual help. If it is considered important, ambivalent judgment can be detected in about half of the cases. The authors conclude: "Intensive solidarity is not self-evident" (Coenen-Huther et al. 1994: 334). Reluctance can be observed, especially in view of long term relations.

Another important approach to the study of the dynamics which are interesting from the perspective of ambivalence is presented by Finch & Mason (1993). They looked at processes of negotiation. Apparently, in contemporary society adult children do not feel themselves morally obliged to support their parents financially on a regular basis. Both parties however, agree that occasional support is appropriate. There is a general principle of conditional help. Beside members of the family, the support of formal organizations is drawn on, and all the parties involved search for a balance between dependence and independence. On an ideal or ideological level, the principle of mutual responsibility is accepted; however, it remains open how it is practiced. The negotiations reveal an obvious ambivalence regarding solidarity.

All these studies, whether they explicitly used the concept of ambivalence or whether they have results which hint at ambivalence, lead us to conclude that this concept, used as a postulate or heuristic hypothesis, promises an enrichment in the study of intergenerational relations. Yet the operationalization of the concept presents serious challenges. Many measurements, insofar as they are strictly rooted in a positivistic ideal of science, strive to be unequivocal. Ultimately, the reasons for these difficulties may be found in the fact that ambivalence is, as I said before, a second order interpretation. It refers to the interpretation of interpretations, knowledge and experiences.

It also requires great sensitivity to the different meanings subjects may attribute to the words and statements of everyday language. Furthermore, the perspectives

of those engaged in the diagnosis of ambivalence must be taken into account. Briefly, the empirical study of ambivalences sets high standards for what may be called "semiotic validity", a notion which expands on Bronfenbrenner's criteria of "ecological validity" in the realm of reconstructing meanings in general.

4. Proposal for a heuristic model

Before this background, and remembering that the focus is on conceptual work, I would now like to present a model of intergenerational ambivalence which we have developed in connection with an exploratory project on the relationships among adults after divorce.[4] It is an attempt to combine the postulate of ambivalence with considerations concerning the two basic dimensions implied in the concept of generation. To state this more concretely:

a) Intergenerational relations are institutionally 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 stated 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 point of view of the scientific observer. The institutional preconditions are always references for any "definition of the situation" (Thomas) in view of concrete actions. Total changes seem, at least within the span of two or three generations, unlikely.

I will illustrate this with an example on the societal level. Here, the very term family, regardless of many 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

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[4] The findings of this project and a detailled presentation of the model is provided in Lüscher/Pajung-Bilger (1998).

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 (1988: 160) speaks of a transmission which refers both to what may be called a pattern of receiving (from one generation) and a pattern of giving (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 <u>reproduction</u> and <u>innovation</u>. This polarity contains, at least implicitly 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) Parents and children and the members of other involved generations share a certain degree of similarity. This can 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 by 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. This may be attributed to the constitutive difference which I have referred to in my exposition of the concept of generations. Consequently, on this intersubjective dimension as well, we may postulate an ambivalent polarity. It may be characterized by the two terms <u>convergence</u> and <u>divergence</u>. These terms are general labels which may be specified in connection with specific contexts.

Most studies, as for instance the already mentioned work by Cohler & Grunebaum, juxtapose dependence and independence without separating the institu-

tional and intersubjective dimensions. This implies that these authors assess ambivalence in a way which mingles the personal and institutional components. If, on the contrary, one separates these dimensions, a more differentiated picture emerges, as shown by the following schema:
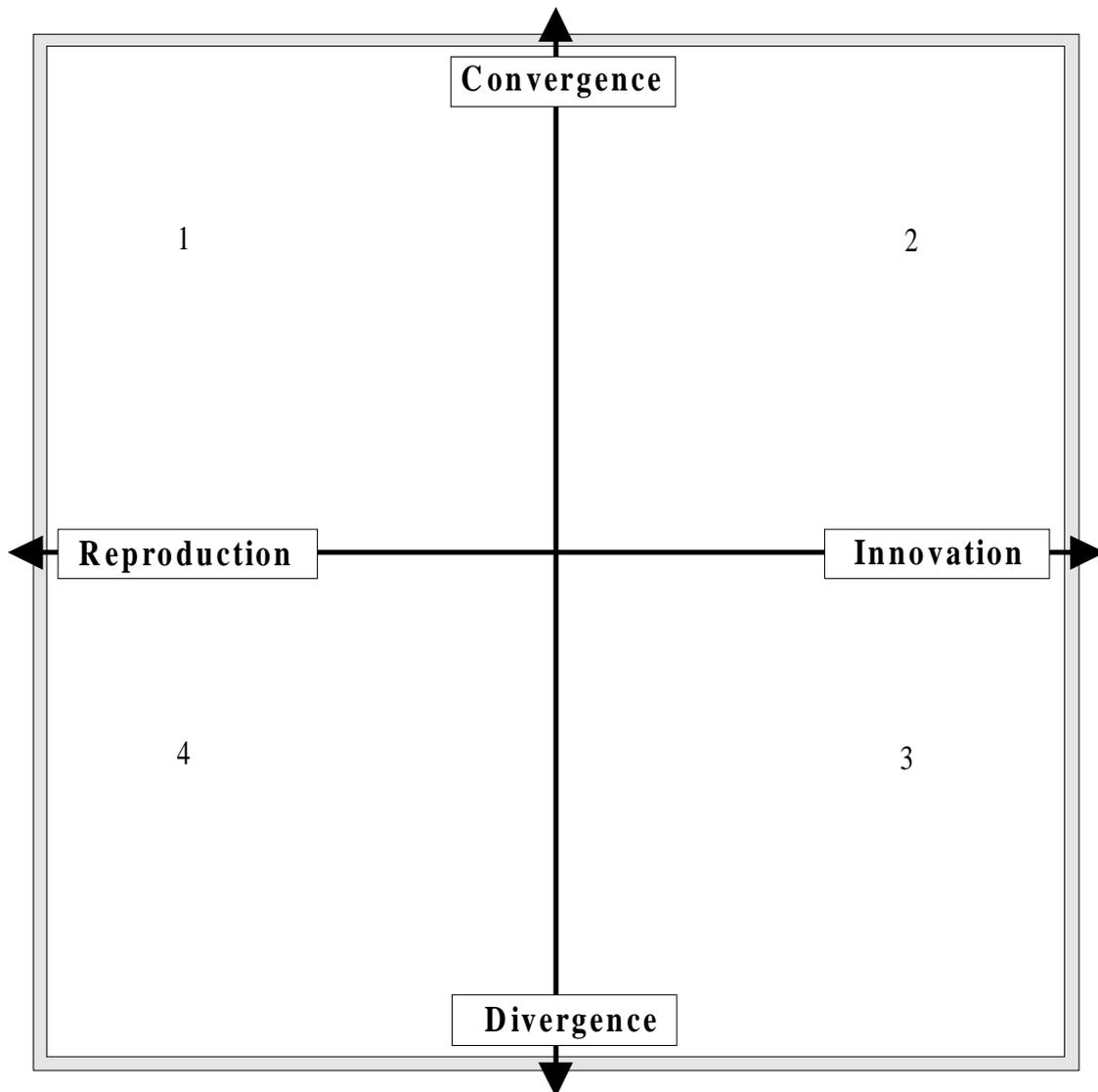
This schema reveals a heuristic potential, insofar as it encourages us to look at different strategies in dealing with ambivalences, depending on whether the behaviors and actions are closer to one or the other pole on both dimensions. Or to start from the other side: reports on how people shape their intergenerational relations and act as a consequence of their relations can be interpreted as the outcome of leaning more toward the one or the other side, yet the assumption remains that the opposite pole cannot be suppressed completely.
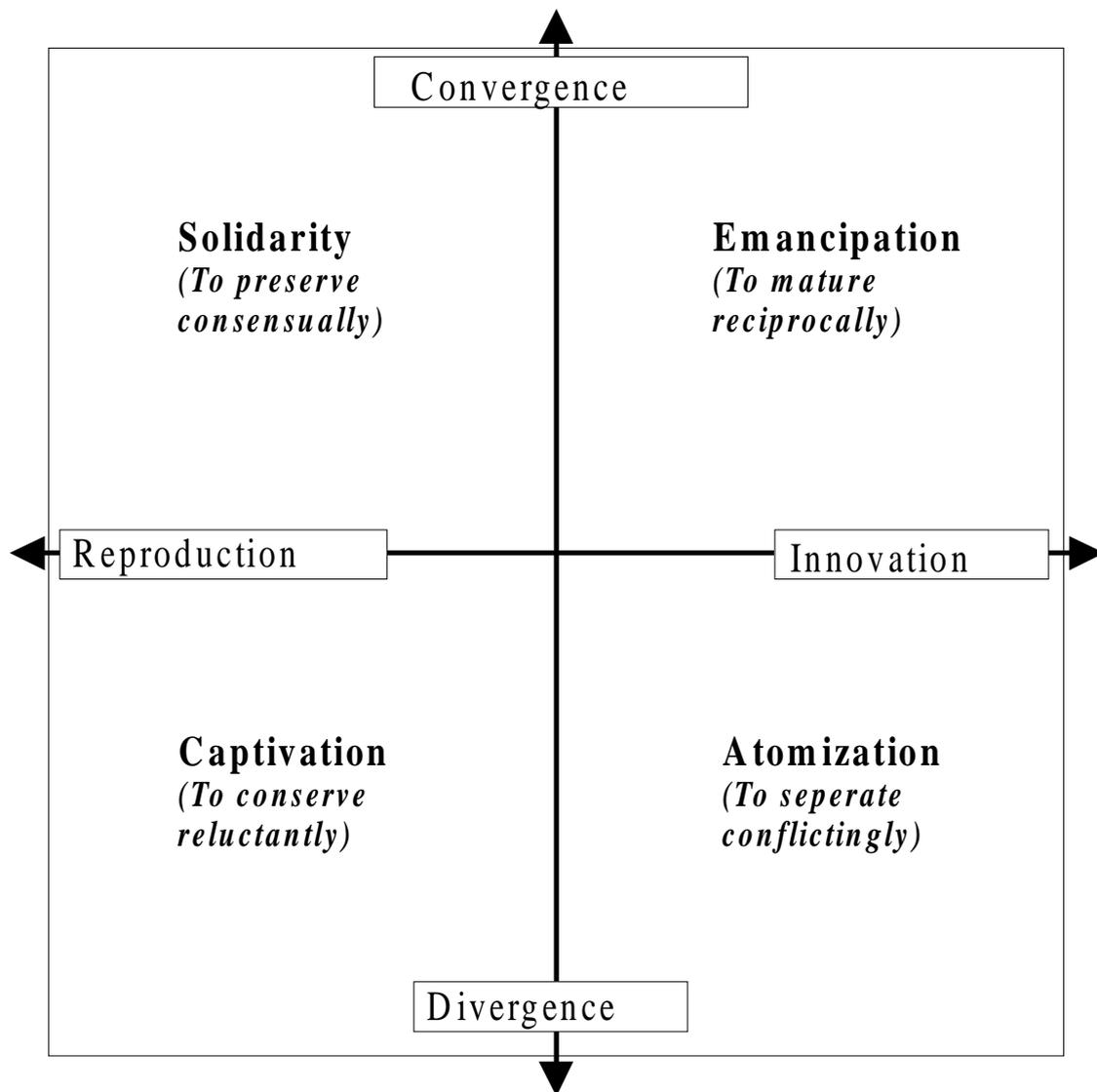
Such a model, and consequently such a research strategy, of qualitative differentiation draws on well-known sociological traditions with theoretically deduced typologies. One is reminded of Parsons's pattern variables. There is, however, one important difference. Parsons tried to interpret the decisions of actors in an unequivocal way. He was interested in definitive solutions for dilemmas. My proposition, on the contrary, keeps in mind that the different strategies employed are of a tentative nature. They are rooted in what are ultimately conceived of as irresolvable dilemmas. The processual nature of intergenerational relations is kept in mind, because of the temporal connotation implied in the concept of ambivalence.

There is also a certain similarity with the "Circumplex Model" developed by Olsen and his collaborators for purposes of family therapy. However, two reservations apply. First, although reference to ambivalence is often made in family therapy, the Olsen model does not use this concept, and, furthermore, the institutional dimension of the family is not taken into account. - Time permitting, further typologies could be mentioned, mostly developed through inductive generalization of empirical data. An example is the already-mentioned Geneva study on kin relations, and another is a study done in Australia by De Vaus (1994).

In our own work we have used this schematic typology to interpret data from semi-structured interviews. Our procedure, in a few words, was the following: In a first step, we extracted from the responses, typical concrete definitions of the situation (or "patterns of meaning") with reference to specific tasks such as, for instance, financial transfers, the consequences of a new partnership of a divorced parent or the support given by parents to young divorced fathers. We were able to assign the answers by means of content analysis to the four cells of the model. We then condensed their common content into maxims. By this we mean general statements concerning typical patterns of actions dealing with ambivalences. Ultimately, we attempted a characterization on the level that we call "the logic of social relations". This concept refers to basic modes of sociability defined on the socio-cultural level. On this level, we also took into account the dimensions of influence and power, because they are an integral part of acting out intergenerational relations.

Still within this exploratory work, we ultimately suggested a general label for the four basic types of strategies for dealing, generally, with ambivalences between generations. Methodologically, of course, this work relies heavily on linguistic interpretations, and it is open to criticism in regard to its validity. Yet, as said before, to bring ambivalences to light and to describe them appropriately, a certain sensitivity to the ambiguities of everyday language is desirable, or may even be necessary.

As a summary, the schema can be presented in the following way (in brackets the corresponding maximes):

	Convergence	
Solidarity *(To preserve consensually)*		**Emancipation** *(To mature reciprocally)*
Reproduction		Innovation
Captivation *(To conserve reluctantly)*		**Atomization** *(To seperate conflictingly)*
	Divergence	

We suggest the label solidarity for the strategies of dealing with ambivalences when reproduction on the institutional level and convergence on the personal level are in the forefront. By solidarity we mean reliable support and the readiness to make payments or to provide services which are not reciprocated. These relations are shaped by a kind of authority which goes beyond the simple exercise of power. Rather it implies (and this is the older meaning of the term authority) that those in power use it in a responsible way, oriented to the best interests of the others. Authority in this sense includes vicarious behavior under conditions of empathy. If solidarity can be realized in this way, it is a relatively sovereign or confident management of inherently ambivalent tensions. Yet tensions are latently in the background, because the solution of tensions is only pragmatic and not ultimate; it is not an ideal final solution. The corresponding maxim implies to preserve consensually.

I would like to emphasize this point, because it implies that the very notion of solidarity, at least as I understand it here, contains latent or implicit ambivalence. Pillemer and I have, in another discussion of the term, shown that enforced or idealized solidarity provokes explicitly ambivalent reactions. We base our statement on a review of the already mentioned work by Cohler & Grundebaum, as well as on work by George (1986) on family caregiving, and Braiker & Kelley (1979), on romantic relationships. - Our understanding of solidarity, then, differs from the common use of the term, insofar as we account for fragility, for tentativeness. In other words, in emphasizing temporal dimensions, we point to the pragmatic character of solidarity and avoid normative idealization.

Opposed to the logic of relations as demonstrated by solidarity are strategies in which the poles of innovation and divergence dominate. One is tempted to speak of individualization, because the integration of the family seems not to be guaranteed by institutionalized commitments. And the experiences of the history of the relations between individuals loosen the interrelationships even more. Taking into account this twofold decoupling, yet bearing in mind that ultimately the relations between parents and children can not be completely dissolved, as these relations remain somehow embedded in institutional givens, I would like to suggest "atomization" as a term. By this we refer to the fragmentation of the unit into its smallest parts, where coherence becomes very loose. In terms of social status, formal equity between the generations dominates. Unforeseen events may pro-

voke tensions, and in this way the latent ambivalences between the generations may actually become virulent. The maxims says separate conflictingly.

A third pattern can be identified when, under the condition of living apart or drifting apart, a strong orientation toward reproduction remains, whereby simultaneously 'divergence' dominates on the subjective dimensions, but emphasis is nevertheless placed on family togetherness. We may observe that one side makes claims on and requests to the others and legitimizes them by references to their institutionalized ties. These lead to unstable conditions of subordination and super-ordination, in which moral pressure regulates the exercise of power. In order to characterize this type one is tempted to refer to a term much used in clinical family therapy, namely enmeshment. However, since this term bears clinical connotations, I prefer to speak of "captivation". This is meant to underline the fact that as a rule one generation, very often the parents, attempts, with reference to the institutionalized order, to maintain its hold on the other or to bind children morally, although individually they feel quite different, distanced, and even estranged. (Maxim: "To conserve reluctantly".)

Still another pattern may be observed when individuals feel close to each other yet do not insist on a reproduction of the institutional arrangements. In contrast, there is a certain openness toward institutional innovations today, that is, to the creation of new forms of family life and partnership. To characterize this type of orientation, I suggest the term "emancipation", being aware that it includes a broad spectrum of meanings. Basically, the idea is to live out intergenerational relations in such a way that the personal growth and development of all individuals involved is guaranteed without completely giving up the customary bonds. This basic agreement or commitment to personal growth regardless of age and lifestyle creates an integrative, although abstract, communality among all the members of the family. The mode of emancipation is a rather sophisticated way to deal with the ambivalences of intergenerational relations, and most likely requires a permanent negotiation among equals. (Maxim: "To mature reciprocally".)

As I stated before, this typology is of an exploratory character, and it serves here to demonstrate the heuristic character of the general postulate: Intergenerational relations both imply and generate ambivalences. It is obvious that further work must include the development of research instruments which are more precise

and intersubjectively more reliable. Taking into account what has been said in regard to the <u>methodology</u> of dealing with ambivalences, multiple procedures seem to be the most appropriate. Thus, in regard to a new project, we are currently working on the development of the following instruments to study intergenerational relations in families:

- "<u>Ambivalence assessment</u>", which attempts to define the poles which characterize the dimensions of ambivalences.
- "<u>Ambivalence awareness</u>", which attempts to capture the awareness of the ambivalence between children and parents.
- "<u>Ambivalence management</u>", which, by drawing on typical stories, searches for strategies for dealing with ambivalences in everyday life. In our project, we also use an instrument on <u>societal generational relations</u>, and one to describe the <u>socio-ecological contexts</u>.

Furthermore, a differentiation of the perspectives of the generations is needed, and ultimately the instruments must be designed to allow for a triangulation of the different approaches. We will also keep in mind the two-sidedness of agencies in dealing with and living out social relations. I am aware that this task requires developing more differentiated hypotheses, but I hope that I have been able to demonstrate the fruitfulness of the heuristics of the general hypothesis, and in this way it can be seen as a partial answer to Lye's call for a new theoretical orientation.

5. Outlook

Intergenerational relations - as I said in my introduction - refer to basic problems of human sociality. This is why they have always been of great concern to mankind. This implies a special challenge to the social sciences. It lies in the necessity to take into account the relevance of these relations without idealizing them. This danger is obvious if one looks at them under the primacy of solidarity. Such a view is blind to the typological plurality of experiences and the possibility of different forms. It also underestimates the tentative character of all practical solutions.

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 I would like to call the "<u>generational</u>

paradox". It means, on one side, that intergenerational relations are endangered on all social levels, the society, organizations, firms and the family. On the other side, these relations are seen as ties which guarantee social integration.

Paradoxes are - I would claim - the equivalent on the level of arguments and language of those contradictions which we refer to, in terms of emotions, experiences and relations, as ambivalences. In taking ambivalence as a point of reference for our analysis, we may be able to contribute to the semiotic validity of the "problem of generations" in our present times, i.e., in contemporary (postmodern) societies. Such a realistic view may also be a more reliable base for social policies than the idealization of family ties.

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University of Konstanz, Research Center "Society and Family"

Prof. Dr. Kurt Lüscher, Director

Ingeborg Moosmann, Secretary

Research staff

Sabrina Böhmer, M.A. Soz.

Hans J. Hoch, Dr. phil.

Andreas Lange, Dr. rer. soc.

Wolfgang Lauterbach, Dr. phil.

Frank Lettke, Dr. phil.

Brigitte Pajung-Bilger, M.A. Soz.

Frank Ziegler, Dipl.-Soz.

Foreign Associate

Prof. K. Pillemer, Ph.D., Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. (Bronfenbrenner Life Course Center

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