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# INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN ADULTHOOD: THE ROLE OF FAMILY NORMS IN INTERGENERATIONAL SUPPORT AND AMBIVALENCE

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This study was based on data from the INTERGEN project (*Intergenerational Relations in Luxembourg: Solidarity, Ambivalence, Conflict?*, FNR 2007-2011), financed by a grant of the Luxembourg National Research Fund to the second author; both authors are linked to the COST Action IS1311 Intergenerational Family Solidarity across Europe (INTERFASOL).

Starting from Bengtson's solidarity paradigm, we will investigate the role of internalized family norms in intergenerational support as well as experienced ambivalence from the adult child perspective. We assume that internalized family norms are an important determinant of relationship regulation as they have an impact both on the selection of specific behavior as well as on its evaluation. As a consequence, own and others' behavior should be most positively evaluated if it is in line with internalized norms and values. In contrast, if intergenerational solidarity and support exchange do not converge with internalized norms and expectations, ambivalence might be experienced. These assumptions are examined in a sample of  $N = 131$  middle-aged adults living in Luxembourg and Germany. Findings showed that normative aspects of intergenerational solidarity were less important compared to affective aspects when predicting support exchange between adult children and their parents; however, family values had a moderating role in the relation between support exchange and ambivalence. Results are discussed with respect to the centrality of values in implicitly and explicitly guiding support behavior within families.

Keywords: intergenerational solidarity, social support, adult child-parent relations, family values, ambivalence



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## **INTRODUCTION**

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Intergenerational relations and solidarity have become key issues in public discourse in the last years and research activities have substantially grown in psychology, sociology and economics (Albert & Ferring, 2013). After claims of a decline of the family in the Western world due to individualization processes, it is generally acknowledged today that family and intergenerational solidarity continue to play key roles in modern societies. Nonetheless, family forms and functions might differ considerably between – and even within – different countries.

As a common background, many countries all over the world have seen important socio-demographic changes in the last decades, such as increased life expectancies and falling fertility rates. As the typical intergenerational structure of Western families has developed more and more towards the shape of a beanpole, vertical family relations – i.e. between family members from different generations – have become more common and important than ever (Bengtson & Martin, 2001). Upward and downward flows of support between adult children and their parents have been documented in many studies, and it seems that the older generations remain often net providers of support until a rather old age, when the picture might turn around (Litwin, Vogel, Künemund, & Kohli, 2008). As a matter of fact, the probability that one will need care and support in old age rises with increased life expectancy, and family still covers the lion's share of support and care for the aged (Ferring, 2010). In this regard, it has been claimed that adult children might reciprocate the support they received from their parents earlier through lagged forms of solidarity at a later point in life (Attias-Donfut, Ogg, & Wolff, 2005; Silverstein, Conroy, Wang, Giarrusso, & Bengtson, 2002).

As has been demonstrated by many studies using the SHARE (Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe) data set, there seems to be a North-South gradient regarding the invested time and effort as well as the frequency of intergenerational exchange and support in Europe, which seems to be related to different policies but – interrelated to this – also depends on differences in underlying value orientations and adherence to normative obligations (see e.g. Hank & Buber, 2009; Saraceno, 2008). For instance, Southern European countries have been described as more "family-centered" compared to Northern European countries with the continental ones lying in between. Other authors could not confirm such a clear-cut North-South division of European countries regarding support exchange between younger and older generations (e.g., Glaser, Tomassini, & Grundy, 2004). In this vein, Dykstra and

DRUŠ. ISTRAŽ. ZAGREB  
GOD. 27 (2018), BR. 1,  
STR. 5-25

ALBERT, I., FERRING, D.:  
INTERGENERATIONAL...

Fokkema (2011) were able to identify several types of late-life families in a latent class analysis using the first wave of SHARE data – namely, descending, ascending, supportive at distance, as well as autonomous family types. Although the prevalence rates differed, all types could be observed in each SHARE country.

What becomes clear from the reported cross-national comparisons is that a variety of solidarity patterns exist between and within countries, and that family values and norms seem to play an important role here. Whereas the impact of values and norms has thus been well documented at the societal level, the question remains: how can we describe the roles of values and norms regarding intergenerational solidarity at the family or individual level? This is the focus of the present study. More precisely, we will focus on the role of internalized family norms in intergenerational support exchange and the experience of ambivalence of adult children toward their parents.

### **Bengtson's solidarity paradigm**

The most influential model to describe intergenerational family solidarity was certainly put forward by Bengtson (e.g. Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). This model describes several dimensions of solidarity, referring to structural solidarity (i.e. opportunity structures that might foster social interactions between generations, such as residential proximity), associative solidarity (i.e. kind and frequency of contact between family members), consensual solidarity (i.e. agreement regarding values and beliefs), normative solidarity (i.e. expectations within the family, mutual obligations), emotional solidarity (i.e. affective closeness) as well as functional solidarity (i.e. mutual support). A conflict dimension was added after criticism and claims that the negative aspects of family relations were missed out in the model (see e.g. Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry, & Silverstein, 2002).

The different dimensions are supposed to be interrelated and multiple studies have applied this model as a theoretical framework, finding support for interconnections between the dimensions with some being more strongly connected to each other than others. Whereas opportunity structures are as a matter of fact related with the mere possibility of providing practical support or having frequent face-to-face contact (see e.g. Kiilo, Kasearu, & Kutsar, 2016), the relation between other dimensions seems less unequivocal. For instance, whereas normative solidarity is often supposed to play a crucial role in support provisions, several studies have demonstrated that other aspects might be more influential in this regard, such as for instance emotional solidarity or an intergenerational consensus regarding values (Albert, Ferring, & Michels, 2013). Also,

DRUŠ. ISTRAŽ. ZAGREB  
GOD. 27 (2018), BR. 1,  
STR. 5-25

ALBERT, I., FERRING, D.:  
INTERGENERATIONAL...

the perspective from which one regards intergenerational relations plays a role here – parents rate their relations toward their children generally more positively than vice versa, a phenomenon which has been described by the intergenerational stake hypothesis (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Birditt, Hartnett, Fingerman, Zarit, & Antonucci, 2015). With regard to intergenerational solidarity, studies have suggested a more unconditional support from the older to the younger generations whereas shared values were a more important predictor of provided support upwards the generational ladder (Albert et al., 2013; Hammarström, 2005).

### **The role of family values and norms**

If Bengtson's solidarity paradigm provides clear assumptions regarding the roles of family values and norms in intergenerational support provision, less is known about how such exchange is evaluated depending on internalized family norms of specific family members. Branco and Valsiner (2012) define values as "motivational dispositions that are deeply rooted in individuals' affective domains" (p. ix). As such, values serve as guiding principles in people's lives, guiding the selection of behavior as well as its evaluation (Schwartz, 1992). Nonetheless, everyday life interactions and choices might well differ from what people define as their ideal values, depending also on situational factors and on the centrality of such values for the individual (Branco & Valsiner, 2012; Verplanken & Holland, 2002). In fact, despite the generally presumed motivational character of value orientations, a value-behavior link has not always been evident in empirical studies. Interestingly, results in a study by Bardi and Schwartz (2003) suggest that the value-behavior link may sometimes be covered by normative societal pressure to behave in a certain way. In fact, when a certain norm is highly prescriptive in a given society, there might not be much behavioral choice for an individual with regard to the expression of this specific norm.<sup>1</sup> If one considers the above-mentioned cross-national results of higher family obligations being reported in societies with more intense support exchange, but also the sometimes lacking interconnections between normative and functional solidarity at the individual level, it could thus be that an ecological fallacy is at play here, i.e. country level findings cannot be readily transferred to the individual level (Hofstede, 2001).

Family values – the focus of our study – are defined as traditional and collectivist value orientations with respect to the family with a normative character (see e.g. Kagitcibasi, 2007). In this sense, they provide rules for how family members should behave and relate toward each other, formulate

DRUŠ. ISTRAŽ. ZAGREB  
GOD. 27 (2018), BR. 1,  
STR. 5-25

ALBERT, I., FERRING, D.:  
INTERGENERATIONAL...

obligations toward each other, and describe roles of family members (Georgas, 2006). Thus, they constitute an essential part of family identity (Cigoli & Scabini, 2006). Interestingly, sometimes adherence to family values and norms were found to enhance stress and burden related to caregiving for elder parents, whereas other times they were related with higher life satisfaction. As Davey and Takagi (2013) suggest, a possible explanation for the sometimes negative and sometimes positive connotations of family values and norms might in fact refer to their origin and source. Referring to familism – the prioritizing of family over individual needs, closely related to the concept of filial responsibility – these authors distinguish between obligatory and voluntary components, as well as between fluidity and flexibility in practicing it. Especially in the form of obligatory forces, familism norms could create stress for family members, whereas familism that refers to voluntary practices of intergenerational solidarity could strengthen family relationships. It makes thus a difference if individuals feel obliged to follow family values and norms that they experience as imposed by society or important others, or if they have actually internalized such norms and adhere to them voluntarily.

### **Intergenerational ambivalence**

If we behave incongruent to our ideals, this might certainly feed back into our evaluations of our own behavior. This brings us to the ambivalence concept which was mainly introduced into family research by Lüscher and Pillemer (1998) and has proven a useful concept for describing intergenerational family relations theoretically as well as empirically in recent years (see also Albert, Abbey, & Valsiner, 2018). It refers to one's oscillation (or vacillation) between opposing emotions, cognitions and/or behavioral tendencies toward the same object, in this case mother or father, and these contradictions are supposed to be experienced as temporarily or permanently irreconcilable (Lüscher et al., 2017). Contrary to the original solidarity approach, the ambivalence concept allows for positive and negative aspects of intergenerational relationships to co-occur at the same time. Close relations with high support exchange might be particularly prone to the experience of ambivalences, and times of transition have been identified as especially susceptible. Although considered as an inherent part in intergenerational relations, this does not mean that all relations are ambivalent all the time (Lüscher & Hoff, 2013). Intergenerational relations should not be considered as static but as dynamic, since an ambivalent relationship might, for instance, evolve into a harmonious or tense relation and vice

DRUŠ. ISTRAŽ. ZAGREB  
GOD. 27 (2018), BR. 1,  
STR. 5-25

ALBERT, I., FERRING, D.:  
INTERGENERATIONAL...

versa (Ferring, Michels, Boll, & Filipp, 2009; Hogerbrugge & Silverstein, 2014). On the one hand, ambivalence might be thought of as a catalyzer that triggers processes and dynamics that help further develop a relationship (Cabell & Valsiner, 2014). On the other hand, one can think of cases where individuals are trapped in ambivalent relationship patterns and where the ambivalence becomes a more or less permanent characteristic of the relationship (Albert & Ferring, 2018).

The determinants and conditions under which ambivalences might occur are not yet fully understood. However, several factors might enhance or reduce experiences of ambivalence. As a situational factor, for instance, Van Gaalen, Dykstra, and Komter (2010) have proposed that the experience of negative ambivalence might be fostered when "exit options" are missing, i.e. when one is forced to stay in a certain situation and to behave in a certain way – a notion that Lewin (1931) already described as an essential motivational conflict.

Based on these reflections, how could we explain the observation that ambivalences are often experienced in particularly close relations with high support exchange? Taking into account value orientations as an explanatory variable, we suggest here that ambivalence could especially result for those persons who are in high solidarity relations (with their children, parents, and/or grandparents) but also show more individualistic preferences regarding their own lifestyle; high support and personal goals and expectations may be perceived as incompatible here. Instead, when acting in line with own ideals, ambivalence should be reduced.

## **AIMS OF THE STUDY**

In the present study, we apply the frameworks of the solidarity model and the ambivalence concept, thereby combining both and looking for connecting points. Our aims are two-fold: Firstly, we will examine the role of internalized family norms in social support provision of adult children toward their mothers and fathers, taking into account further aspects of intergenerational solidarity while applying Bengtson's paradigm. We expect that family norms will play a significant role in intergenerational support provision but assume that further aspects such as emotional relationship quality might be even more important. Secondly, we will explore how far intergenerational support exchange is related to the experience of ambivalence in adult child-parent relations and analyze the moderating role that family values may play here. We expect that adherence to family norms will significantly moderate the relation between support provision or receipt and the experience of ambivalence toward mother or father. More precisely,

the more behavior is in line with own values and internalized norms, the less space there should be for the experience of ambivalence; more experienced ambivalence should show, however, if there is no fit between values and behavior.

## **METHODS**

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### **Sample**

The sample was part of the INTERGEN project ("Intergenerational relations in Luxembourg: Solidarity, Ambivalence, Conflict?", PI: Prof. Dr. Dieter Ferring; FNR 2007-2011)<sup>2</sup> funded by the Fonds National de la Recherche Luxembourg. A number of  $N = 131$  adults between the ages of 32 and 64 ( $M = 44.89$ ;  $SD = 6.66$ ; 68.2% females) living in Luxembourg and the German border region<sup>3</sup> (61.8% Luxembourgish nationality; 29.8% German) participated in the present study. Most of the participants were married or in a partnership (76.2%), had children (78.9%) as well as brothers or sisters (85.4%) and were gainfully employed (85.5%). A number of 50.3% had at least a high school diploma (24.2% had a university degree). Participants were asked to respond to several general questions as well as to specific questions with regard to both of their parents where possible (or referring to the parent that was still alive).

Almost all participants ( $N = 124$ ) reported on the relations toward their mothers who had an average age of  $M = 72.59$  ( $SD = 8.00$ , Range: 54-93) and were mostly living rather close (residential distance: < 50 km for 82.6% of the sample). About half of the mothers were married/in a partnership (51.6%) and their health status was rated as at least good (50.8%)

A number of  $N = 70$  reported also on their relations toward their fathers with an age range between 57 and 87 ( $M = 72.52$ ,  $SD = 6.87$ ), most of whom were married/in a partnership (88.4%) and lived less than 50km from the respondents (79.4%). Their health status was rated as at least good in 54.3% of the sample. Missing data were listwise deleted.

### **Measures**

Participants were asked to fill out a standardized questionnaire which first contained questions on socio-demographic aspects, second about some personal characteristics as well as value orientations, and third several questions regarding their relations toward their mothers and toward their fathers, asked separately. Participation in the study was voluntary, informed consent was obtained by all participants and anonymity of questionnaires was assured. Data collection was in line with the UL ethics guidelines.

### **Intergenerational solidarity**

In detail, five forms of intergenerational solidarity were assessed as follows.

*Structural solidarity* was measured by Geographical distance to mothers/fathers assessed by a scale ranging from 1 = "<5km" to 5 = ">100 km".

*Associational solidarity* covered contact frequency assessed on a scale ranging from 1 = "less than once a year" to 6 = "daily".

*Affective solidarity* indicated by emotional relationship quality was measured by positive and negative emotions experienced when thinking about one's mother and father, respectively, which were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = "never" to 5 = "always". In the present study, we used only the positive emotions that refer to affection in the relations to parents with  $k = 6$  items (e.g. "close", "deep affection"; Boll, Ferring, & Filipp, 2005). Reliabilities were all very satisfactory (in the relations toward mothers:  $\alpha = 0.92$ ,  $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ; in the relations toward fathers:  $\alpha = 0.95$ ,  $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ).

*Normative solidarity* was assessed based on Georgas' family values scale regarding obligations toward family with  $k = 7$  items (e.g. "Adult children should maintain good relationships to their parents", "Adult children should support their parents when they are old"; Georgas et al., 2006). Participants had to rate on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = "does not apply at all" to 5 = "fully applies") how much these statements applied to them personally. We refer thus to internalized family norms of the participants rather than what they perceive as societal norms. Reliabilities were satisfactory ( $\alpha = 0.74$ ;  $M = 3.82$ ;  $SD = 0.54$ ).

*Functional solidarity and reciprocity* were described by given and received social support in case of need, measured by  $k = 7$  and  $k = 8$  items respectively (e.g. "I am there when my mother/father needs me"; "My mother/father offers me help when I need it"; Albert et al., 2013; see also Berlin Social Support Scales, Schulz & Schwarzer, 2003). Items had to be rated again on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = "does not apply at all" to 5 = "fully applies", reliabilities were all satisfactory (given support for mothers:  $\alpha = 0.86$ ,  $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ; received support from mothers  $\alpha = 0.96$ ,  $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ; given support for fathers:  $\alpha = 0.91$ ,  $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ; received support from fathers  $\alpha = 0.91$ ,  $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ).

### **Experienced ambivalence**

This construct was measured by a newly developed questionnaire (Michels, Albert, & Ferring, 2011) which contains statements regarding contradictory emotions, cognitions and behavioral tendencies in the relations to parents to be rated on a 5-



-point Likert scale from 1 = "does not apply at all" to 5 = "fully applies". Here, we used a long version with  $k = 22$  items (e.g. "When my mother/father needs me, I like to be there for her/him, but I also want to follow my own interests"; "I have a close relation to my mother/father, but I feel choked"). Reliabilities were all very satisfactory (in the relations to mothers:  $\alpha = 0.90$ ,  $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ; in the relations to fathers:  $\alpha = 0.91$ ,  $M = 2.11$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ).

## RESULTS

### Prediction of functional solidarity

Our first research question referred to the interrelations between the different solidarity dimensions as described by Bengtson, and in particular the predictive value of family values for functional solidarity of adult children with their mothers and fathers. Our correlational analyses showed that most measured solidarity dimensions were significantly interrelated at the level of zero-order correlations, both with regard to mothers and fathers. With regard to mothers, the structural solidarity dimension (geographic distance), however, was only related to associational solidarity (contact frequency) and functional solidarity (support for mothers) but not to normative (family values) and affective solidarity (emotional relationship quality) as well as reciprocity (received support). All other measured dimensions showed significant correlations (see Table 1, upper triangle).

TABLE 1  
Intercorrelations  
between solidarity  
dimensions in the  
relations toward  
mothers ( $N = 124$ )  
and fathers ( $N = 70$ )

	Geographical distance	Contact frequency	Family values	Affection	Received support	Provided support
Geographical distance	1	-0.68**	-0.08	-0.06	-0.17	-0.31**
Contact frequency	-0.70**	1	0.21*	0.33**	0.43**	0.55**
Family values	0.09	0.09	1	0.40**	0.40**	0.35**
Affection	0.02	0.31**	0.53**	1	0.80**	0.64**
Received support	-0.18	0.48**	0.46**	0.77**	1	0.70**
Provided support	-0.07	0.42**	0.56**	0.75**	0.72**	1

Note. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Upper triangle: relations toward mothers; lower triangle: relations toward fathers

With regard to relations toward fathers, the pattern was similar, however, here structural solidarity was only related to associational solidarity, and associational solidarity was not related to normative solidarity whereas all the other correlations were similar (Table 1, lower triangle).

In the next step, we were interested in the relative importance of single solidarity dimensions, in particular normative solidarity, to predict functional support. Therefore, we carried

out regression analyses in order to predict support provision by all other dimensions, separately for mothers and for fathers. All analyses were controlled for several socio-demographic aspects in the first step (see Table 2).

	Provided support toward mothers			Provided support toward fathers		
	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$
Step 1	$R^2 = 0.04$			$R^2 = 0.07$		
Age of participant	0.02	0.02	0.13	-0.02	0.03	-0.08
Gender of participant	-0.01	0.17	-0.01	-0.14	0.28	-0.07
Age of parent	-0.00	0.02	-0.01	0.02	0.03	0.15
Marital status of parent	-0.04	0.18	-0.02	0.63	0.36	0.23+
Health status of parent	-0.10	0.10	-0.11	-0.13	0.17	-0.10
Step 2	$R^2 = 0.73^{**}$			$R^2 = 0.75^{**}$		
Geographical distance	-0.12	0.05	-0.19**	0.10	0.08	0.14
Contact frequency	0.06	0.05	0.11	0.15	0.08	0.22+
Family values	0.07	0.09	0.04	0.34	0.18	0.19+
Affection	0.19	0.09	0.22**	0.45	0.13	0.49**
Received support	0.39	0.08	0.53**	0.20	0.12	0.23+

Note. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

TABLE 2  
Predicting adult  
children's support  
provision for their  
mothers and fathers  
by solidarity  
dimensions sensu  
Bengtson

With regard to the relations toward mothers, the most important dimensions to predict functional support were reciprocity, followed by affective solidarity and structural solidarity, whereas normative solidarity and associational solidarity did not play a significant role here. Results of multiple regression analysis might be blurred due to multicollinearity and it might be difficult to interpret the relative importance of each predictor because beta-weights are dependent on the further variables included in the regression equation. Therefore, we carried out relative weight analysis<sup>4</sup> which allows determining each predictor's unique contribution to the explanation of variance in the specific model tested (Barni, 2015; Johnson, 2000; Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2015).<sup>5</sup> Similar results were obtained when applying relative weight analysis. Again, received support as indicator for reciprocity proved to be the most important predictor (34.1% of explained variance in the regression analysis), followed by affective solidarity (30.2%), contact frequency (15.8%), geographical proximity (12.9%) and finally, normative solidarity (6.9%).

Regarding relations toward fathers, only affective solidarity was found to be as a significant predictor, whereas reciprocity, normative solidarity and associational solidarity showed only a tendency ( $p < 0.10$ ), and structural solidarity was not related to functional solidarity provided for fathers. The results of relative weight analysis confirmed this pattern with affective solidarity being the most important predictor (35.6%), followed by received

support (30.6%), normative solidarity (21.7%), contact frequency (10.2%) and finally, geographical distance (1.8%).

### Support exchange, family values and ambivalence

Regarding our second research question, we were interested in the relations between support provision and ambivalence, as theory suggests that relations with high support exchange might be especially prone to the experience of ambivalence. However, we expected not every relation with high support exchange to be also highly ambivalent. Instead, we hypothesized that internalized family values might be a moderator. As values serve to evaluate own and others' behavior, we expected the relation between support provision or receipt with ambivalence to be weaker if it is in line with own family values. In order to test our hypotheses, we applied regression analyses according to Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003) where we included both main effects of support provision and receipt respectively, and internalized family values as well as the interaction between both in order to predict the experience of ambivalence. All variables were z-standardized before building the interaction term.

Regression analyses showed similar result patterns both for provision and receipt of support that differed slightly, however, for reports addressing mother or father (see Tables 3 and 4). An interaction effect between support provision and family values was found for maternal relations, whereas between support receipt and family values a moderator effect was found in all cases. The direction of effects was tested via post hoc plotting of the interactions (see Jaccard & Turrisi, 2003; figure 1).<sup>6</sup>

**TABLE 3**  
Predicting adult children's experience of ambivalence toward their mothers and fathers by their support provision, family values and the interaction of both

	Ambivalence toward mothers			Ambivalence toward fathers		
	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$
Step 1	$R^2 = 0.03$			$R^2 = 0.22^{**}$		
Age of participant	0.00	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.16
Gender of participant	-0.03	0.12	-0.02	0.43	0.15	0.34 <sup>**</sup>
Age of parent	0.01	0.01	0.11	0.00	0.01	0.01
Marital status of parent	-0.07	0.13	-0.06	-0.04	0.19	-0.02
Health status of parent	0.01	0.07	0.02	-0.17	0.09	-0.22+
Step 2	$R^2 = 0.17$			$R^2 = 0.29^{**}$		
Provided support	-0.15	0.06	-0.27 <sup>**</sup>	0.11	0.08	0.20
Family values	-0.06	0.06	-0.10	-0.12	0.08	-0.20
Provided support x Family values	-0.13	0.04	-0.36 <sup>**</sup>	-0.08	0.05	-0.21

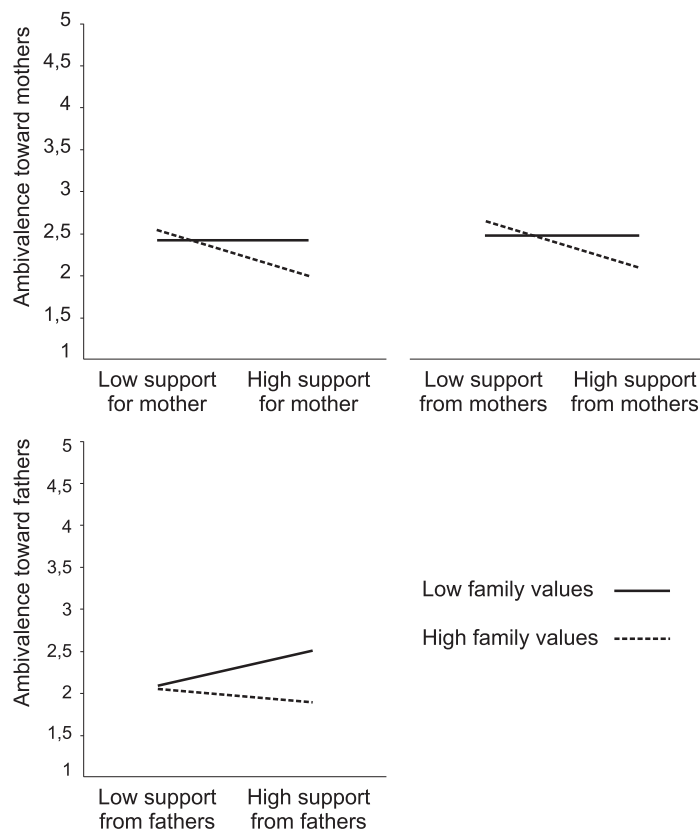
Note. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . All variables were z-standardized before building the interaction term. Analyses are controlled for socio-demographic variables age of participant, gender of participant, age of parent, marital status of parent, health status of parent.

	Ambivalence toward mothers			Ambivalence toward fathers		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Step 1	$R^2 = 0.03$			$R^2 = 0.22^{**}$		
Age of participant	0.00	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.16
Gender of participant	-0.03	0.12	-0.02	0.43	0.15	0.34 <sup>**</sup>
Age of parent	0.01	0.01	0.11	0.00	0.01	0.01
Marital status of parent	-0.07	0.13	-0.06	-0.04	0.19	-0.02
Health status of parent	0.01	0.07	0.02	-0.17	0.09	-0.22+
Step 2	$R^2 = 0.19^{**}$			$R^2 = 0.30^{**}$		
Received support	-0.18	0.06	-0.31 <sup>**</sup>	0.08	0.08	0.15
Family values	-0.02	0.06	-0.03	-0.12	0.08	-0.20
Received support x Family values	-0.15	0.04	-0.33 <sup>**</sup>	-0.11	0.05	-0.27 <sup>*</sup>

Note. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . All variables were z-standardized before building the interaction term. Analyses are controlled for socio-demographic variables age of participant, gender of participant, age of parent, marital status of parent, health status of parent.

TABLE 4  
Predicting adult children's experience of ambivalence toward their mothers and fathers by their received support, family values and the interaction of both

FIGURE 1  
Post hoc plotting of interaction effects predicting ambivalence toward mothers and fathers at low and high support provision for mothers and low and high received support from mothers and fathers respectively regarding participants with low (1 SD below the mean) compared to high (1 SD above the mean) family values



In fact, in the relations toward mothers, the participants who reported high family values experienced less ambivalence when providing more support ( $B = -0.27, p < 0.01$ ; 95% CI [-0.42, -0.12]) compared to those with low family values where no relation between support provision and the experience of ambivalence was shown ( $B = -0.01, n.s.$ ; 95% CI [-0.12, 0.11]). A similar pattern showed when receiving high support: in this case, participants who had high family values reported less experienced ambivalence ( $B = -0.28, p < 0.01$ ; 95% CI [-0.43, -0.14]) compared to participants with low family values ( $B = -0.02, n.s.$ ; 95% CI [-0.15, 0.11]) see Figure 1 on the left).

Regarding relations toward fathers, for those who reported low family values, ambivalence increased with perceived support from their fathers ( $B = 0.18, p < 0.05$ ; 95% CI [0.00, 0.36]). As regards participants with high family values, their experience of ambivalence was not related to support receipt ( $B = -0.08, n.s.$ ; 95% CI [-0.28, 0.13]). Interestingly, male participants reported significantly higher ambivalence toward fathers compared to female participants.

## DISCUSSION

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Two main goals were addressed here. First, we applied Bengtson's solidarity model in order to describe interrelations between solidarity dimensions of adult children toward mothers and fathers; we were interested in predicting the provision of support for parents by different indicators of intergenerational solidarity as proposed by Bengtson, focusing in particular on the role of family values in the context of other solidarity aspects. Second, we analyzed the role of family values as a moderator of the relation between support exchange and the experience of ambivalence toward mother or father.

When looking at the interplay of different solidarity dimensions in order to predict support provision, differences in patterns regarding maternal and paternal relations became evident. With regard to mothers, the normative aspects of intergenerational solidarity were less important compared to other solidarity dimensions, whereas reciprocity and emotional relationship quality were most important. With regard to the fathers, a similar picture occurred, with functional solidarity being predicted most strongly by a positive emotional relationship quality with one's father, followed by reciprocity; however, also normative solidarity accounted for a fifth of explained variance in the regression analysis. These results might give a first hint to differences in the functioning, roles and the dynamics of intergenerational relations to mothers and fathers. Mothers have often been described as kin keepers in family relations (e.g., Connidis, 2010). They seem to be more involved in

DRUŠ. ISTRAŽ. ZAGREB  
GOD. 27 (2018), BR. 1,  
STR. 5-25

ALBERT, I., FERRING, D.:  
INTERGENERATIONAL...

direct support exchange, thus adult children might more often feel that they want to give back what they receive(d) from their mothers. Regarding support exchange with fathers, findings underline a different situation that might be due to different roles and functions associated to father and mother within families. The probability of exchanging support with one's father is also explained to some extent by norms of filial responsibility. One cannot exclude that mothers may also mediate the support exchange between children and fathers, and this is a question for further research.

With respect to the assumed moderating role of family values in the relation between support exchange and ambivalence, our hypotheses were confirmed. We could observe significant interaction effects both for received and provided support to one's mother as well as for received support to one's father. In fact, those participants who reported low internalized family values experienced higher ambivalence toward their parents when their relations were characterized by high support exchange. It seems thus that for these participants, the high provision or receipt of support is not in line with their personal preferences and expectations. These participants might either feel that they provide more support than they would like to, or they might feel the high support they receive from their parents as inadequate. Instead, participants who share high internalized family values are acting in line with their own values and preferences when providing high support to parents, and they are also at ease with receiving more support from their parents as they might find it rather natural and as a sign of family cohesion. Thus, a person who provides much support but is not convinced by this could feel ambivalence, whereas high support provision could reduce the experience of ambivalence if persons adhere highly to family values. This is in line with our assumptions of family values serving not only for the selection of a certain behavior but also for the evaluation of own and others' behavior.

Previous studies have shown that especially times of change, be it at the societal level or family life transitions, are prone to the experience of ambivalences (Kasearu, Raid, & Kutsar, 2018; Lüscher & Hoff, 2013). In fact, such situations might entail changes in priorities, preferences, values and norms which may remain unclear, at least for a while. When own and others' normative expectations are unclear, contradictory or not compatible with each other, the probability for the experience of ambivalence might thus be enhanced. In fact, several authors have suggested that times of societal change – when rules and norms become less clear and less binding – are particularly prone to the experience of ambivalence (see

e.g. Kasearu et al., in press). Inconsistencies in behavior and values can result here since it might become more difficult for an individual to decide what is right or wrong. In fact, ambivalence might arise in circumstances of insecurity, such as *should I or should I not provide support for my parents? Is it expected from me, do I expect it from me, or not?*

As Dykstra and colleagues (2013) suggest, own behavior might also feed back into value orientations, as a behavior that is not consistent with own beliefs and wishes could finally contribute to a change in these beliefs in order to reduce cognitive dissonance (see also Festinger, 1957). The experience of ambivalences could be involved here serving as a catalyzer of such instances (Cabell & Valsiner, 2014).

Interestingly, the patterns differed again between maternal and paternal relations: whereas higher support provision and receipt reduced ambivalence toward mothers especially for participants who adhered to high family values, receiving support in relations to fathers mainly enhanced ambivalence for those with low family values. These findings are again in line with different role expectations and profiles of relationship quality that have been described with regard to mothers and fathers (see e.g. Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Different themes seem to be prevalent regarding ambivalence experienced toward mothers compared to fathers, in the first case rather related to issues of support exchange, in the second case rather regarding the regulation of autonomy and dependency (see also Michels et al., 2011). Here lies a significant task for further research exploring different models that ageing parents represent for their adult children. Also, the gender difference in the experience of ambivalence toward fathers was notable; further research should take up this point in order to have a deeper look at gender specific dynamics.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY**

We are fully aware that this study can only render heuristics for further research given its correlational structure and comparatively small sample size. There are no clear-cut hypotheses about causal relations between the considered constructs given that we lack a theoretical rationale for this. We would like to state, however, that we consider family relations including all norms involved here, as well as support exchanges and ascriptions of emotional relationship quality, as a kind of syndrome with its inherent internal dynamic that may not follow such a linear logic (see Ferring, 2017). Here, we relied on participants' indications regarding their internalized family norms, but it would be desirable for future studies to assess also their felt societal pressure to conform to certain norms.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

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In the present study, internalized family values were identified as an important determinant in the relationship regulation of adult children toward their parents. Our findings describe a value-behavior congruence in the sense that higher support of adult children toward parents is particularly related to lower ambivalence when support provision is in line with own goals and values regarding the family; it is related to higher ambivalence when support provision is not in line with own values and expectations. If one acts according to own value orientations, this should thus lead to strong signs in either direction and therefore lower ambivalent feelings should result (Abbey & Valsiner, 2005; Albert, Abbey, & Valsiner, 2018). Our findings regarding the roles of internalized family values in the evaluation of support exchange could also help to further explain links that have been found between support exchange and well-being (e.g. Fingerman, Kim, Tennant, Birditt, & Zarit, 2016).

In the present study, the combination of different approaches toward family relations – the solidarity paradigm as well as the ambivalence concept – which have sometimes competed in recent years, has proven useful. First of all, the correlational patterns were in line with Bengtson's solidarity model, and earlier findings about the higher importance of affective solidarity and reciprocity compared to normative solidarity could be confirmed. Second, by adding a further aspect, namely the experience of ambivalence, we were able to gain further insight into how adult children might experience their intergenerational exchange relations toward their parents. Values do not only serve as guiding principles in the selection of behavior but also in its evaluation, and this is where the main role of family values in intergenerational solidarity might be found. Evaluative processes are inherent in the regulation of intergenerational solidarity and the adherence to family values seems to make a difference especially in high support relations. Future studies should have a closer look at the roles that internalized values and ambivalence play in these relationship dynamics.

## **NOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> Certainly, with respect to the subjective norm, one could further distinguish between the perceived social pressure to show a certain behavior (i.e. perceived expectations of important others) and an individual's willingness to comply with these expectations, thus an individual's internalization of these norms (Ajzen, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> The first author was project collaborator; a further collaborator was Dr. Tom Michels. Data were collected by Daisy Schildermans, Catrin Ross and Françoise Hufenbecher. We thank all persons involved in this project for their invaluable work.



DRUŠ. ISTRAŽ. ZAGREB  
GOD. 27 (2018), BR. 1,  
STR. 5-25

ALBERT, I., FERRING, D.:  
INTERGENERATIONAL...

<sup>3</sup> Luxembourgish and German participants did not differ on any of the study variables.

<sup>4</sup> As the focus here was on main predictors, demographic variables were not included in the RWA model.

<sup>5</sup> Calculations were carried out by use of the online tool provided under <http://relativeimportance.davidson.edu>

<sup>6</sup> Simple slopes were plotted by use of the template provided by <http://www.jeremydawson.co.uk/slopes.htm>

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## Međugeneracijska solidarnost u odrasloj dobi: uloga obiteljskih normi u međugeneracijskoj potpori i ambivalentnosti

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Polazeći od Bengtsonove paradigme solidarnosti, istražiti ćemo ulogu usvojenih obiteljskih normi u međugeneracijskoj potpori te iskustvo ambivalentnosti iz perspektive odrasloga djeteta. Pretpostavljamo da su usvojene obiteljske norme važna odrednica regulacije odnosa, jer utječu i na odabir specifičnoga ponašanja i na njegovu procjenu. Slijedom toga, vlastito ponašanje, kao i ponašanje drugih, trebalo bi najpozitivnije ocijeniti ako je u skladu s usvojenim normama i vrijednostima. Nasuprot tomu, ako međugeneracijska solidarnost i razmjena potpore nisu usklađeni s usvojenim normama i očekivanjima, može se iskusiti ambivalentnost. Ove pretpostavke ispituju se na uzorku od  $N = 131$  odrasle osobe srednjih godina koje žive u Luksemburgu i Njemačkoj i koje su opisale svoj odnos prema majkama i očevima. Rezultati pokazuju da su normativni aspekti međugeneracijske solidarnosti bili manje važni u usporedbi s afektivnim aspektima u predviđanju razmjene potpore između odrasle djece i njihovih roditelja. Međutim, obiteljske vrijednosti imale su posredničku ulogu između razmjene potpore i ambivalentnosti. Rezultati su izloženi s obzirom na centralnost vrijednosti koje implicitno i eksplicitno usmjeravaju pružanje potpore unutar obitelji.

Ključne riječi: međugeneracijska solidarnost, društvena potpora, odnosi odrasle djece i roditelja, obiteljske vrijednosti, ambivalentnost



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