

Ambivalence and Attachment in Family Relationships

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Introduction

Parents and children can drive each other mad. At one moment, a parent may be encouraging and affectionate toward the child, whereas, in the next moment, the parent may be sending the child to his or her bedroom. Similarly, a child who seems helpful and cooperative can suddenly turn belligerent. Of course, parents and children may partly resolve the mixture of negative and positive feelings they experience in such situations by remembering their basic love for each other. Nevertheless, these conflicting sentiments will be stored in the memory of both parties, contributing to a long-lasting melange of conflicting beliefs, feelings, and behaviors. What are the psychological consequences of this state-of-affairs in relationships?

This issue is relevant to research on attitudes, which are tendencies to favor or disfavor objects or ideas in the environment (Olson & Maio, in press). People spontaneously form attitudes toward just about everything, ranging from other people and pets to abstract ideas and issues. These evaluative tendencies subsume positive and negative beliefs, feelings, and past behaviors toward the objects (Zanna & Rempel, 1988), and when this mental assortment simultaneously contains a high amount of positive and negative elements, the attitude is said to be ambivalent (Connor & Sparks, 2002; Esses & Maio, 2002; Priester & Petty, 1996). In our view, this construct of attitudinal ambivalence helps yield special insights into the working of relationships.

This chapter focuses on the influence of ambivalence on one of the central aspects of relationships: psychological attachment processes. Attachment processes involve the formation of a strong affectional bond to another person (Bowlby, 1969). People's capacity to form these bonds is presumed to emerge in infancy and persist throughout the lifespan. As a result, the


attachment of children to parents has received considerable attention from researchers, and these particular attachment bonds are also the focus of this chapter.

Before examining the relations between attitudinal ambivalence and attachment to parents, it is essential to consider in detail the meaning of each construct. Consequently, the first section of this chapter will describe conceptualisations of attitudes and attitude ambivalence, followed by conceptualisations of attachment style. The remainder of the chapter then presents evidence on the relation between these constructs and highlights some important directions for future research.

Attitudes and Attitude Ambivalence

As noted above, many researchers argue that attitudes have three conceptually distinct components (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; Esses & Maio, 2002; Zanna & Rempel, 1988): cognition, affect, and behavior. The cognitive component subsumes positive and negative beliefs about attributes of the attitude object; the affective component subsumes positive and negative feelings about the attitude object; and the behavioural component subsumes positive and negative behaviours toward the attitude object. For instance, a daughter who dislikes her father may hold negative feelings toward him (e.g., resentment, shame), negative beliefs about him (e.g., he's hot-tempered and violent), and negative behaviors toward him (e.g., avoidance, yelling). Together, these cognitions, affects, and behaviours express an unfavourable attitude toward the child's father.

Often, these three components should be similar in overall valence (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, 1998). In the present example, it would be logical for the daughter to develop negative feelings and behaviors toward her father because of his bad temper and violence. It would seem to be psychologically difficult for her to hold positive feelings and behaviors in the face of these characteristics. Nonetheless, the potential prevalence of synergistic beliefs, feelings, and

behaviors does not necessarily preclude the occasional existence of conflicting beliefs, feelings, and behaviors. In fact, children's needs for succor can be so strong that they may regard positively a caregiver who is abusive to them (Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 1999CC ). Thus, despite the tendency for these components to be similar in valence, exceptions may occur.

Such exceptions can be labelled as instances of intercomponent ambivalence, which is conceptually and empirically distinct from intracomponent ambivalence (Esses & Maio, 2002; Maio et al., 2000; MacDonald & Zanna, 1998). Intracomponent ambivalence exists when there are conflicting reactions within an attitude component. In our example, the daughter might harbour some positive feelings toward her father (e.g., awe) in addition to the negative feelings. Similarly, she might possess some positive beliefs about him (e.g., he's strong) and perform some positive behaviors toward him (e.g., hugging), despite the negative beliefs and behaviors. As a result, each of these three components (i.e., beliefs, feelings, and behaviors) would be marked by some degree of ambivalence.

Theoretically, such intracomponent ambivalence can be high even when intercomponent ambivalence is low. This situation can arise because all of the components may be equally positive or negative on average, while each possess high or low levels of ambivalence within them (see Maio et al., 2000). In fact, although many of the effects of intracomponent ambivalence have been conceptually replicated in studies of intercomponent ambivalence (e.g., MacDonald & Zanna, 1998; Maio, Esses, & Bell, 2000; Maio, Fincham, & Lycett., 2000; Maio, Greenland, Bernard, & Esses, 2001), they may also produce distinct effects on occasion (e.g., Hodson, Maio, & Esses, 2001). For this reason, it is important to examine both types of ambivalence in research on this construct.

Nonetheless, prior research has often examined intracomponent ambivalence. This type of ambivalence has been associated with a variety of important consequences outside of the

relationship context. For example, people who are ambivalent to members of another ethnic group tend to respond in a polarized manner to members of those groups; that is, the same behaviors performed by another ethnic group will lead to more extreme positive or negative reactions than if the behaviors were performed by the ingroup (Bell & Esses, 1997; Bell & Esses, in press). In addition, people who possess greater ambivalence toward a group react more negatively to ethnophaulisms directed at the group (Simon & Greenberg, 1996). Also, ambivalence about an issue causes people to scrutinize persuasive messages about the issue more carefully (Jonas, Diehl, & Brömer, 1997; Maio, Bell, & Esses, 1996).

Overall, such evidence supports the significance of the ambivalence construct, and it is possible that this significance extends to the formation of attachment bonds in relationships. Before addressing this issue, however, it is essential to consider the psychological nature of attachment processes.

Attachment Styles

According to Bowlby's (1969) seminal theorizing, attachment processes begin in infancy as part of a biological behavioural system. This system is designed to protect infants from predation, facilitate learning, and provide comfort from stress. To achieve these aims, the infant bonds with a primary attachment figure, who is the most familiar, available, and responsive person in the infant's environment.

Several types of attachment bonds can be formed between the infant and the parent, however. Each type of attachment bond reflects a unique mental representation of the parent that is held by the child. Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) identified three types of attachment styles in infant-parent relations: secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent. The secure style exists when the caregiver is regarded as being consistently warm and responsive; the avoidant style exists when the caregiver is seen as rejecting and withdrawn; the anxious-avoidant

style exists when the caregiver is regarded as being inconsistent and insensitive to the child's needs.

To identify the existence of these styles in an infant-parent relationship, Ainsworth et al. (1978) developed the Strange Situation. In this situation, a caregiver (usually the mother) and an infant from 12 to 18 months interact briefly in a laboratory. The caregiver then withdraws from the room briefly and returns. The infant's response to the caregiver on her return is used as an indicator of the infant's attachment style. If the infant is easily comforted and willing to be close after separation, the child is classified as being secure. If the child shows little distress at separation and resists contact afterward, the child is classified as avoidant; if the child seeks closeness while expressing discomfort and anger, she or he is classified as anxious-avoidant.

These attachment styles in children may persist into adulthood (Bowlby, 1979). For this reason, procedures have also been developed to assess attachment styles in adults. For example, Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy (1985) developed the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) to classify parents' attachment styles, using their recollections of their own childhood. Amazingly, these attachment scores predicted the behavior of the adults' children in the strange situation (see van IJzendoorn 1995), suggesting some transmission of attachment styles across generations (cf. Elicker, Englund, & Sroufe, 1992; Shaver et al., 1996).

Such continuity indicates that the measurement of adult attachment styles provides a useful glimpse of a deep, well-rooted psychological process, which may spill over and affect relations with others, in addition to relations with children. In fact, since the mid-1980s, several groups of researchers have demonstrated the value of assessing adults' attachment to romantic partners and to others in general (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990). For example, Bartholomew (1990) developed a measure of general adult attachment that assesses four attachment styles: secure, dismissing (i.e., avoidant/indifferent), fearful (i.e., avoidant), and preoccupied. These

four styles reflect internal working models of the self and the other. The secure style subsumes positive models of the self and other; the dismissing style subsumes a positive model of the self and a negative model of the other; the fearful style subsumes negative models of the self and other; the preoccupied style subsumes a negative model of the self and a positive model of the other.

There is abundant evidence that adult attachment styles predict many psychological processes and relationship features. For example, adults with more secure attachment styles tend to indicate higher amounts of relationship commitment, relationship satisfaction, relationship stability, and sexual activity (see Hazan & Shaver, 1993). In contrast, adults with secure attachment styles are less likely to exhibit anger, depression, neuroticism, and romantic jealousy (Hazan & Shaver, 1993). Thus, attachment styles possess many important psychological correlates.

Ambivalence and Attachment

Despite the importance of attachment styles to many psychological processes, we know comparatively little about variables that contribute to the formation of different attachment styles. Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory indicates that the child-parent relationship is the first place to look for important predictors, because this relationship sets the patterns of interactions that are the foundations for the child's mental representations of others. Nonetheless, an interesting issue is exactly how these patterns of interactions become translated into the mental representations of others.

Attitudes may be an important intervening variable, because children should spontaneously form attitudes toward their parents during the course of interaction with them. These attitudes should reflect the children's positive and negative (a) beliefs about the parent, (b) feelings about the parent, and (c) past behavioural experiences with the parent. In turn, the

positive and negative beliefs, feelings, and behaviors should influence the style of the affectional bonds between them. In fact, Brickman (1977) suggested that people's integration of their negative feelings about a person with the positive feelings should be "the strongest determinant of their capacity to love." In addition, Freud (1926/1948) speculated that ambivalence is an important variable to consider within child-parent relationships.

One can therefore hypothesize that ambivalence triggers weak affectional bonds. This possibility becomes more concrete when different attachment styles are considered. In particular, attachment theory predicts that children are securely attached to their parents when the children possess positive beliefs, feelings, and behavioural experiences regarding the parents (see Collins & Read, 1994). In contrast, children who are ambivalent toward their parents should have a mixture of positive and negative elements in their attitudes, which should result in less secure attachment. Consequently, ambivalence toward a parent should be negatively correlated with secure attachment toward the parent.

What about the relations between attitudinal ambivalence and the other attachment styles? Bartholomew's (1991) conceptualisation of attachment helps with predictions about these relations, because it explicitly separates the model of self from the model of other. Theoretically, ambivalence toward a parent should make the model of other (i.e., the parent in this example) more negative and ambivalent than is typical in relationships. Consequently, ambivalence should increase the likelihood of fearful attachment and dismissing attachment because each of these styles involves negativity and ambivalence in the model of other. In contrast, ambivalence should decrease the likelihood of preoccupied attachment because this style involves a purely positive model of other, which is less likely to occur as the ambivalence in the model of the other increases.

These predictions have been partly supported. Levy, Blatt, and Shaver (1998) asked undergraduate participants to describe their perceptions of each parent and then scored these reports on several dimensions, including attitudinal ambivalence. They also assessed participants' secure, dismissing, fearful, and preoccupied attachment to romantic partners.

On the one hand, as predicted by attachment theory, participants who were ambivalent toward their father were less securely attached to others. A similar trend was evident in the relation between ambivalence toward the mother and secure attachment, but this relation was significant only in one of two measures of attachment. People who were ambivalent toward their father were also significantly more likely to exhibit fearful attachment. On the other hand, ambivalence toward the mother did not predict fearful attachment, and there was a positive (not negative) relation between ambivalence toward the parents and pre-occupied attachment, but only for one measure of attachment. In addition, ambivalence did not predict dismissing attachment. Thus, the relations between ambivalence toward the parents and each insecure attachment style were not clear-cut.

Nevertheless, Levy et al.'s (1998) findings provided excellent initial support for the importance of examining the relations between ambivalence and attachment style in relationships, because many significant, theoretically-expected relations were obtained. These findings also opened some complex issues for understanding the role of ambivalence in attachment processes. These issues form the basis for the studies that are reported in this chapter.

Issues Addressed in The Present Research

Other attitude properties. Perhaps the most important caveat is that ambivalence is not the sole attitude property that might conceivably predict attachment style, and the effects of ambivalence might be potentially attributable to some other attitude property. Attitude research has found that attitudes vary in numerous ways other than their subsumed ambivalence (Esses &

Maio, 2002; Wegener, Petty, & Fabrigar, 1995). For example, attitudes vary in valence (i.e., positive vs. negative). In the relationship context, this property is important because people tend to have positive attitudes toward their parents, partners, and children. As a relationship deteriorates, people may mix negative elements with their positive elements in their attitude (Brickman, 1987; Fincham, Beach, & Kemp-Fincham, 1997). As a result, the overall attitude becomes more negative in valence, while also becoming ambivalent. Thus, it is important to verify that effects of ambivalence (i.e., the combination of high positivity and negativity) are distinct from effects of a more negative net attitude per se.

Of course, attitudes vary in many ways other than valence. For example, people vary in the extent to which they feel subjectively committed to their attitude. This commitment is assessed by asking people to rate the certainty, clarity, and intensity of their attitudes (see Wegener et al., 1995). In addition, attitudes vary in evaluative consistency (see Chaiken, Pomerantz, & Giner-Sorolla, 1995). High consistency exists when the net attitude is consistent with the evaluation implied by an attitude component. For example, consistency between the net attitude and relevant cognitions can be examined. This variable is often labelled evaluative-cognitive inconsistency, and it is operationalized as the magnitude (absolute value) of the difference between the favorability implied by one's overall attitude and the favorability implied by one's beliefs about the attitude object (Chaiken, Pomerantz, & Giner-Sorolla, 1995; Rosenberg, 1968).

Also, attitudes vary in the extent to which they are embedded in or linked to a lot of attitude-relevant information (e.g., beliefs and feelings about the target; Esses & Maio, 2002; Wood, Rhodes, & Biek, 1995). When attitudes are highly embedded, people can easily retrieve many beliefs, feelings, or behaviors relevant to their attitudes. Thus, counts of these beliefs, feelings, and behaviors can be used to quantify embeddedness (Esses & Maio, 2002).

In theory, these attitude properties and other attitude properties (e.g., accessibility; Fazio, 2000) might explain some of the relation between ambivalence toward parents and general attachment styles. For this reason, it is useful to measure these properties in attitudes toward parents and test whether ambivalence predicts attachment styles independently of these properties. In fact, we expect that ambivalence does uniquely predict attachment. Prior studies have shown that ambivalence uniquely taps the psychological conflict within an attitude (even more than the constructs tapping evaluative consistency; Maio et al., 2000). Furthermore, ambivalence uniquely predicts other phenomena that are presumed to occur as a result of internal psychological conflict, including attitudinal polarizations (Bell & Esses, 1997, in press) and the processing of persuasive messages (Maio et al., 1996, 2000). These findings are important because the attachment system is sensitive to psychological conflict (Simpson, Rholes & Phillips, 1996), and, therefore, ambivalence should uniquely predict attachment processes.

Measurement of ambivalence. In Levy et al.'s (1998) research, ambivalence was subjectively inferred by coders of the participants' descriptions of their parents. In contrast, the attitudes literature has utilized two approaches that are more direct operationalizations of ambivalence. One general approach asks participants to describe the amount of ambivalence that they feel (e.g., Cacioppo et al., 1997; Newby-Clark, MacGregor, & Zanna, 2002). A disadvantage of this approach is that it relies on people's descriptions of their internal processes (i.e., ambivalence), and these descriptions can be influenced by a variety of factors, including personal theories about the variables that should influence how people feel (Bassili, 1996; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Ross, 1989).

Another general approach partly avoids this pitfall by calculating ambivalence based on participants' endorsement of positive and negative responses toward a target (Bassili, 1996). For example, one technique asks participants to rate their positivity on a single unipolar scale (e.g.,

from “not at all positive” to “extremely positive”) and their negativity on an additional scale (e.g., from “not at all negative” to “extremely negative”). An additional technique asks participants to list their beliefs, feelings, and/or behaviors regarding a target and then rate the positivity or negativity of each response (see Esses & Maio, 2002). The ratings are then used to calculate the total positivity and the total negativity across the responses. For both techniques, the positivity and negativity scores can be combined using formulae that calculate the extent to which there are high amounts of ambivalence (i.e., high simultaneous positivity and negativity). Interestingly, regardless of which formulae are used, the correlations between subjective ambivalence ratings and calculated ambivalence scores tend to be low (Newby-Clark et al., 2002; Priester & Petty, 1996). Thus, in research on the relations between ambivalence and attachment, it is important to utilize both types of ambivalence measures.

Differences between mother and father. Levy et al. (1998) found that the relations between ambivalence toward each parent and general attachment styles differed across parents. For instance, ambivalence to the father predicted fearful attachment, but ambivalence to the mother did not predict fearful attachment. Before interpreting this result, however, it is important to test whether ambivalence toward the father and mother are independent predictors of general attachment style. This issue is important because children’s level of ambivalence toward their father may be similar to the level of their ambivalence to the mother, making it conceivable that any relations between ambivalence toward each parent and attachment are partly due to ambivalence toward the other parent. The Levy et al. (1998) data did not indicate whether ambivalence toward the father is related to ambivalence to the mother. Consequently, it is an open issue whether effects of ambivalence to the father on attachment to others are independent of effects of ambivalence toward the mother.

Nevertheless, there are reasons to suspect that ambivalence toward the father independently predicts attachment to others. In particular, ambivalence toward the father may be unique because fathers assume different roles in the rearing of children than do mothers (Lamb, 1975, 1981; Phares & Compas, 1992; Rohner, 1998). In fact, some perspectives suggest that fathers' roles often provide a key link between the family unit and the external world. For example, Parsons and Bales (1955) suggested that fathers are more likely to have an action-oriented approach to child-rearing, and this focus includes an emphasis on helping children succeed in the external world. Similarly, Albelin (1980, as cited by Machtingler, 1981) argued that fathers offer young children "a stable island of practicing reality" (p. 153). If such speculations are correct, ambivalence to fathers may indeed account for variance in general attachment that cannot be explained by ambivalence to mothers.

Mediating mechanisms. In theory, ambivalence toward parents predicts general attachment styles because ambivalence toward parents affects attachments to parents, which, in turn, influence attachment to others (see, e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1990). That is, according to attachment theory, the mental representations of parents become the basis for mental representations of the self and others. Therefore, ambivalence should influence attachment to others through the mental representations of the parents. Prior research has not directly examined this potential role of attachment to parents, making it an important issue for the present research.

Relations with insecure attachment styles. It is also important to examine attachment to parents because these attachment styles might help identify why Levy et al. (1998) found only weak relations between ambivalence toward parents and the general insecure attachment styles. This result suggests that the general insecure attachment styles tap mental representations of others that are psychologically distinct from ambivalence toward parents. Before confidently

reaching this conclusion, however, it is necessary to replicate the weak relations between ambivalence toward parents and the general insecure attachment styles.

If these weak relations are obtained again, it would be useful to begin looking for factors that may dampen the strength of these relations. One possible explanation is that ambivalence toward parents is simply too far removed from insecure attachment to other people in general. Perhaps ambivalence toward parents is more closely tied to the mental representations encompassed by insecure attachment to the parents. This possibility can be examined using measures of attachment to the parents. If these measures were more strongly related to ambivalence toward parents, it would be apparent that part of the reason for the low relations is the target of the general attachment measures.

Childhood vs. young adulthood. Levy et al. (1998) warned that their results should be extended to younger samples. This issue is important partly because it has been suggested that children's capacity for attachment to others increases as they age (Hazan & Zeifman, 1994; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). . From this perspective, the early teenage years provide an interesting period of transition, because teenagers have only recently begun to form more general attachments. Thus, it is interesting to test whether relations between ambivalence and general attachment styles emerge before the general attachment styles crystallize in adulthood.

Cultural differences. There are notable differences in family practices across cultures, and some of the differences may be reflected in various demographic statistics across countries. For example, Italy has the lowest birth rate in Europe, whereas Britain has one of the highest (ref.). In addition, Italian children (especially boys) are more likely to maintain high dependency and closeness to their parents well into adulthood (Scabini, 2000). As a result of such differences, Italian attachment bonds might be more secure and exhibit different relations to other variables (e.g., ambivalence) than in countries like Britain.

Study 1: Basic Relations Between Ambivalence and Attachment

To begin addressing these issues, our first study examined 66 young adolescents (12 to 14-year-olds) in Wales (Maio, Fincham, & Lycett, 2000). We tested whether children's ambivalence toward their parents predicted the children's general attachment styles, while statistically controlling for the valence, commitment, embeddedness, and consistency in the children's attitudes toward their parents. During a 30-min break in their classes, the participants completed an open-ended questionnaire asking them to list their feelings and beliefs about their mother as well as a thermometer-like scale to assess the valence of their attitudes toward her. Participants also rated their commitment to these attitudes, using scales that asked them to rate the certainty and intensity of their feelings. Similar measures were presented to assess attitudes and attitude commitment regarding the father. A third questionnaire assessed general attachment styles, and it was randomly placed between or after these questionnaires.

After listing their feelings and beliefs regarding each parent, participants were asked to go back and rate the positivity or negativity of each feeling and belief. These ratings were then entered into a previously validated formula for measuring ambivalence from open-ended measures (see Bell, Esses, & Maio, 1996). In addition, we counted the number of feelings and beliefs that were listed, in order to estimate attitudinal embeddedness. Also, we calculated the extent to which participants' responses to the question assessing attitude valence were consistent with the net valence of the beliefs and feelings (evaluative consistency). Together with the index of attitudinal commitment derived from the self-report scales, these measures were used to predict participants' general attachment styles.

We used Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) Relationship Questionnaire to assess secure, dismissing, fearful, and preoccupied attachment styles in participants' general relationships with others. Each style was described in a brief paragraph, and, for each paragraph,

participants rated the extent to which the description reflects them, using a 7-point scale from 0 (not at all like me) to 6 (very much like me). For example, the description of a secure relationship with people in general was as follows:

It is easy for me to have close friendships with other people. I am comfortable depending on other people to do things for me. I feel OK if other people depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or if people don't like me.

As expected, the results indicated that children who were ambivalent toward their father or mother were less likely to endorse the general secure attachment style than were children who were nonambivalent (see Maio et al., 2000). In addition, children who were more ambivalent toward their father were less likely to endorse the preoccupied (i.e., ambivalent) attachment style. Interestingly, none of the other correlations between ambivalence and the insecure attachment styles were statistically significant. In addition, a regression analysis revealed that participants' ambivalence toward their father predicted general secure attachment independently of ambivalence toward their mother, but ambivalence toward their mother did not predict secure attachment independently of ambivalence toward the mother.

Given these results, we conducted regression analyses to test whether ambivalence toward the father predicted general secure attachment independently of the other attitude properties. In each analysis, ambivalence and one other attitude property (e.g., attitude commitment) were entered as simultaneous predictors of attachment. Results indicated that the relations between ambivalence and secure attachment remained significant when the other attitude properties (e.g., commitment, embeddedness) were statistically controlled. Thus, higher ambivalence predicted less secure attachment independently of these other properties.

Overall, then, the results of this first study extended Levy et al.'s (1998) findings in several ways. First, our direct measure of ambivalence replicated their observation of a negative

relation between ambivalence toward the father and general secure attachment. In addition, as in their research, ambivalence was not consistently related to the insecure attachment styles, despite our use of an objective, direct measure of ambivalence. Interestingly, however, we also found that ambivalence toward the father predicted secure attachment independently of ambivalence toward the mother. This new finding supports prior theories that fathers tend to act more as a model of how to relate to others (e.g., Parsons and Bales, 1955), and begs further investigations of role asymmetries in child-rearing. Another important finding was that ambivalence predicted secure attachment independently of the other attitude properties. Thus, the effects of ambivalence to parents are not attributable some other property of attitudes to parents.

Study 2: The Role of Attachment to Parent

Nonetheless, before interpreting the effects of ambivalence further, we wished to replicate our results in a second study (Maio et al., 2001). This new study was also used to address the lack of evidence assessing the mediating mechanism through which ambivalence predicts general attachment. Specifically, this study tested our hypothesis that relations between ambivalence toward parents and general secure attachment are mediated by attachment to the parents. For example, if this hypothesis is correct, the negative relation between ambivalence toward the father and general secure attachment should be eliminated when attachment to father is statistically controlled.

Our second study tested such possibilities by including a measure of attachment to parents, in addition to the measures of general secure attachment and ambivalence toward each parent that were used in Study 1. Specifically, 44 adolescentss (12 to 14-year-olds) in Wales completed a measure of attachment to parents that was similar to the measure of general attachment styles, except that the wording was changed to refer to parents, rather than people in

general. For example, the paragraph describing a secure relationship with participants' father was as follows:

It is easy for me to be close with my dad. I am comfortable depending on him to do things for me. I don't worry about being alone or if my Dad does not accept me.

As expected, participants who were highly ambivalent toward their father were once again less securely attached to others. Surprisingly, participants who were more ambivalent toward their mother were also less likely to exhibit fearful attachment, unlike the results in our first study. The remaining relations between ambivalence toward the parents and general attachment styles were nonsignificant. Thus, across both studies, the sole consistent relation was the negative correlation between ambivalence toward the father and general secure attachment. Moreover, as in Study 1, this correlation was not eliminated when other attitude properties were statistically controlled using regression analyses.

Given this evidence, our next goal was to test whether this relation between ambivalence toward the father and secure attachment was mediated by attachment to the father. As expected, participants who were ambivalent toward their father exhibited less secure attachment to him, and those who possessed less secure attachment to the father were less securely attached to people in general. More importantly, the negative relation between ambivalence and general secure attachment was eliminated when attachment to the father was statistically controlled in a regression analysis that utilized ambivalence and attachment to the father as simultaneous predictors of general secure attachment. Thus, attachment to the father mediated the relation between ambivalence toward the father and general secure attachment.

Importantly, this result does not preclude the possibility that ambivalence toward the father directly influences general secure attachment, which, in turn, influences attachment to the

father. Although this possibility is not consistent with attachment theory's assumption that the interactions with parents form the basis for mental representations of others, this possibility is empirically testable using a regression analysis that includes ambivalence and general secure attachment as predictors of attachment to the father. Consistent with our expectations, the application of this regression analysis to our data revealed that ambivalence predicted attachment to the father independently of general secure attachment. Thus, general secure attachment did not fully mediate the relation between ambivalence toward the father and attachment to him, and the more sustainable explanation for our data is that attachment to the father mediated the relation between ambivalence toward the father and general secure attachment.

Study 3: Late Adolescents in Another Culture

Together, Study 1 and Study 2 demonstrate a unique effect of attitudinal ambivalence on general attachment and on attachment to parents. The next challenge involved discovering the limitations of ambivalence effects. For example, do the effects of ambivalence occur in older adolescents, who tend to experience more conflict with parents and struggle with their transition to adulthood? Also, do these relations occur in different cultures with different family styles?

It was also worthwhile to examine the effects of ambivalence toward parents on the quality of the relationship between children and parents. Relationship quality is one of the most frequently examined variables in relationships, and it has been linked to ambivalence (Fincham et al., 1997) and attachment style (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1993). In fact, attachment theory predicts that poor relationship quality between children and parents causes less secure attachment (Bowlby, 1969). Consequently, one explanation for the relation between ambivalence toward the father may increase insecure attachment is that ambivalence induces a lower-quality relationship with him. In other words, ambivalence toward the father may cause a less positive relationship with the father, which should cause the development of less secure

attachment. Thus, the effect of ambivalence on secure attachment to the father may be mediated by the quality of the relationship to him.

Nonetheless, there are other ways that relationship quality might relate to ambivalence and attachment. For example, it is conceivable that relationship positivity is an antecedent of the relation between ambivalence and attachment to parents. That is, children who have a poor relationship with their parents might develop more ambivalence toward them, leading to less secure attachment to them. In addition, relationship positivity may be a consequence of the relation between ambivalence and attachment to the parent. For instance, ambivalence to a parent may lead to less secure attachment to the parent, thereby causing a poor relationship with him or her.

In short, there are three potential mechanisms that may link ambivalence toward parents, attachment to them, and the quality of the relationship with the parent, and it is important to empirically test all three models. We began examining these mechanisms using a sample of 218 15-to-19-year-old adolescents in the north of Italy (Messina, Pallari ref.). (As indicated above, Italy was a useful choice because the parenting and family styles in Italy are quite different from those in the United Kingdom.) Participants completed our measures of ambivalence and attachment toward each parent in addition to a measure of the quality of their relationship with each parent. The measure of relationship quality was based on the Positive Affect Index (PAI; Bengtson & Schrader, 1982), which assesses the amount of positive affect that the respondent has for another person and the positive affect that he or she perceives the other person has toward him or her. In this study, we asked respondents to respond to five items asking them to report the extent to which positive features (e.g., love, trusting, understanding) described their relationship with each parent. Participants responded to each item using a 6-point scale from 1 (almost not at

all) to 6 (very, very much). Responses to these items were summed, such that higher scores indicated higher relationship quality.

As in Study 2, the results indicated that participants who were more ambivalent toward their parents were less securely attached to them. In addition, participants who were more ambivalent toward their parents exhibited more dismissing, fearful, and preoccupied attachment to them. Also, participants who were more ambivalent toward their parents perceived the relationship with their parents more negatively. Finally, participants who perceived lower relationship quality exhibited more dismissing, fearful, and preoccupied attachment to them.

Because these results indicated that ambivalence was associated with secure attachment and relationship quality, we tested whether relationship quality mediates the relation between ambivalence and secure attachment to each parent. Interestingly, the relations between ambivalence and secure attachment to each parent were significantly reduced when we controlled for relationship quality, but only when we examined girls' ambivalence and attachment to each parent. Thus, relationship positivity mediated the link between ambivalence and attachment to each parent among girls, but not boys. Relationship quality did not mediate the relation between ambivalence and dismissing attachment in either sex.

As noted above, it is also conceivable that relationship positivity is an antecedent of the relation between ambivalence and attachment to parents. In addition, it is possible that relationship positivity is a consequence of the relation between ambivalence and attachment to the parent. We tested these models using regression analyses similar to those described above, but failed to find consistent evidence supporting either model.

Study 4: Romantic Attachment in Another Culture

Thus far, we have focused on children's ambivalence and attachment to their parents, which are intergenerational variables because they focus on the relationship between children and

parents. It is also possible to examine intragenerational manifestations of ambivalence and attachment. For example, it would be interesting to uncover the relation between ambivalence and attachment among people who are in a close relationship, but whom are not offspring and progenitors. Do high levels of ambivalence predict less secure attachment even in these relationships?

To answer this question, many types of intragenerational relationships can be examined, including close friendships, sibling relationships, and romantic relationships. Nonetheless, attachment in romantic relationships has received the bulk of experimental attention so far (see Shaver, Collins, & Clark, 1996), making it interesting to consider whether ambivalence predicts attachment styles in these relationships. This was the primary aim of our fourth study.

A secondary aim was to re-examine the mediating role of relationship quality in the relation between ambivalence and secure attachment. In Study 3, we found that adolescents' perceived relationship quality with their parents partly mediated the relation between ambivalence and secure attachment to the parents. Similarly, we wished to test whether married partners' perceived relationship quality mediates the relation between their ambivalence and secure attachment to their partners.

Participants were 160 Italian married couples who had at least one adolescent child attending the last three years of high school (Sulca, Palleari ref.). From these couples, 146 wives and 141 husbands returned completed questionnaires. Remarkably, the average length of the marriages was 21.3 years, thereby ensuring that these couples had been together long enough to form strong attachment bonds.

The participants completed the measures of ambivalence and attachment from our prior studies, except that these measures were modified to ask about ambivalence and attachment to each participant's spouse, rather than enquire about a parent. In addition, they completed

Norton's (1983) Quality of Marriage Index. This 6-item inventory assesses marital quality through broadly worded, global items (e.g., "We have a good marriage"). Following Norton's recommendations, responses to each item are standardized and then summed, such that higher scores indicate higher relationship quality.

The results indicated that spouses' ambivalence was negatively related to both marital quality and secure attachment, while being positively related to fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment to the spouse. That is, husbands and wives who exhibited more ambivalence toward a spouse were less likely to be satisfied with their marriage, less likely to be securely attached to the spouse, and more likely to have a fearful, preoccupied, or dismissing attachment style to the spouse. Additional results supported the hypothesis that marital quality mediates the relation between ambivalence and attachment to the spouse. Specifically, the relations between ambivalence and the secure, fearful, and preoccupied attachment styles were eliminated when we controlled for the effect of ambivalence on attachment. Thus, the impact of ambivalence on secure, fearful, dismissing, and preoccupied attachment styles occurred via relationship quality.

Of course, it is also conceivable that marital quality is an antecedent of the relation between ambivalence and attachment to the partner. In other words, people who have a poor relationship with a partner might develop more ambivalence toward him or her, leading to less secure attachment. In addition, it is possible that marital quality is a consequence of the relation between ambivalence and attachment to the partner. That is, ambivalence may lead to less secure attachment with a partner, which can cause a poor relationship with him or her. Similar to the results from Experiment 3, however, both of these alternative models were not consistently supported by the results of regression analyses similar to those described above.

General Issues

At the outset of our research, we sought to discover whether ambivalence toward parents predicts general attachment to others. This issue was important partly because abundant theory has suggested that ambivalence and attachment are important characteristics of close relationships, but no prior research had examined the empirical link between these constructs. In addition, our curiosity was piqued by the idea that a simple property of attitudes toward parents (i.e., ambivalence) may have a potent impact on general attachments to people in general. Our results not only supported this provocative idea, they draw attention to several substantive issues. Below, we outline the issues and their current status.

Predicting Secure Attachment

As it turns out, both of the first two studies obtained evidence to support our prediction that ambivalence toward parents is related to general attachment style. In particular, children who were more ambivalent toward their father tended to be less securely attached to others. Moreover, ambivalence to the father predicted general secure attachment independently of ambivalence toward the mother. Interestingly, ambivalence toward the mother was not consistently associated with general attachment to others (see also Levy et al., 1998). Thus, there is something unique to the child-father relationship that affects the secure attachment to others.

What is the unique feature of child-father relationships? As noted earlier, both theory and research suggest that fathers assume different roles in child-rearing than mothers (Lamb, 1975, 1981; Phares & Compas, 1992; Rohner, 1998), but we know comparatively little about the implications of these differences for child development. Several researchers have suggested that fathers may uniquely act as a model of what to expect from the outside world (Albelin, 1980, as cited by Machtinger, 1981; Parsons & Bales, 1955). If this hypothesis is correct, then

ambivalence towards fathers may uniquely predict a variety of variables, in addition to uniquely predicting general attachment style. For example, ambivalence towards fathers may uniquely predict extroversion, because extroversion is a personality dimension that taps a willingness to interact with others in general, outside of the family unit (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Similarly, ambivalence toward fathers might uniquely predict openness to experience, which is a personality dimension that reflects willingness to seek new intellectual and emotional stimulation (Costa & McCrae, 1992). In short, any variable that taps an orientation to the social world outside of the family should be uniquely affected by ambivalence toward fathers, if the father does indeed act as a model for understanding people outside of the family. This issue remains an important problem for future research.

Regardless of the implications of ambivalence to the father for understanding variables other than attachment, the link between ambivalence toward fathers and general attachment is merely an encapsulation of a longer process. In particular, if fathers come to act as a model for representing others, then children's general secure attachment should reflect the attachment style they have developed with their fathers. Moreover, according to attachment theory (e.g., Bowlby, 1969), different attachment styles emerge because they are mental representations that are built on long-standing patterns of interaction. Consequently, the perceived nature of the quality of the relationship with a caregiver should determine the style of attachments to the caregiver. Thus, effects of ambivalence on general attachment may be mediated by the effects of ambivalence on relationship quality and attachment to each caregiver.

Studies 2, 3, and 4 collected evidence that could be used to test this reasoning. In Study 2, because children who were ambivalent toward their fathers were less securely attached to him, the relation between ambivalence to the father and general secure attachment was reduced when

secure attachment to the father was statistically controlled. In other words, the effect on general secure attachment depended on the effect on secure attachment to the father.

In Study 3, Italian adolescents who were ambivalent toward their parents perceived lower relationship quality in their interactions with their parents and less secure attachment to their parents. In addition, the effect of ambivalence on insecure attachment to the parents was eliminated when the effect of ambivalence on perceived relationship quality was statistically controlled. A similar pattern was obtained in Study 4, except that Study 4 utilized Italian married couples as participants. In this study, participants who were ambivalent toward their spouse perceived lower relationship quality in their interactions with the spouse and reported less secure attachment to him or her. Moreover, the effect of ambivalence on insecure attachment to the partner was eliminated when the effect of ambivalence on perceived relationship quality was statistically controlled.

The results across studies are best summarized by a three-stage model. In this model, the first two stages apply across parent-parent and child-parent relationships, and the third stage applies only to the father-child relationship. In the first step, ambivalence toward a parent or caregiver causes lower perceived quality of the relationship with the person. In the second step, the lower relationship quality causes less secure attachment to the caregiver or spouse. In the third step, which applies only to child-father relationships, secure attachment to the father predicts general secure attachment. Thus, ambivalence toward a family member predicts the quality of the relationship with the family member and the level of secure attachment to him or her, and this specific attachment predicts general attachment styles when the target of the specific attachment is the father.

Of course, this model is an abstraction across the results of our four studies. Future research should test the complete model in a single study. In addition, our causal hypotheses

about the sequence of the stages are currently supported only by the logic underlying path analyses of correlational data (e.g., Cohen & Cohen, 1983; Baron & Kenny, 1986), and it is important to obtain support using experimental paradigms that can manipulate the presence or absence of each factor. Also, it remains vital to determine why the third step applies only to father-child relationships. Perhaps some aspect of the father-child relation is a crucial mediator of the father's unique effect. For instance, ambivalence toward the father may predict general attachment because fathers tend to be less involved in child-rearing and activities around the home. This absenteeism may make fathers seem to be more like individuals from outside the home and, therefore, more appropriate models for attachments to people outside the familial home. If this hypothesis is correct, then ambivalence toward the mother might predict general attachment styles more strongly in families where the mother is absent more than the father. Future research should consider this and other hypotheses.

The Insecure Attachment Styles

The inconsistent relations between ambivalence toward parents and the insecure attachment styles to others (e.g., fearful attachment) are interesting. This pattern was not only obtained in our studies; it was also found by Levy et al. (1998). Thus, these weak relations are replicable across studies.

In contrast, ambivalence did predict insecure attachment to the target of ambivalence across the studies that examined these relations. In Studies 2 and 3, people who were ambivalent toward parents and spouses were preoccupied, fearful, and dismissively attached to them. (These results for Study 2 are described in Maio et al., 2000). Thus, when the target of the attachment style is specifically relevant to the target of the ambivalence, consistent relations emerge.

Nonetheless, only two of the three relations are in directions consistent with prior theory. According to Griffin and Bartholomew's (1994) prototype model of attachment, each attachment

style is a mental representation of the self and the other, who could be a caregiver or an abstract representation of people in general. In this model, dismissive and fearful attachment styles subsume positive beliefs, feelings, and behavioural experiences regarding the other.

Consequently, it makes sense that children who are ambivalent toward their parents should have developed more negativity in their model of the other, causing more dismissive and fearful attachment. Nevertheless, the prototype model suggests that preoccupied attachment subsumes a positive model of the other; thus, ambivalence should decrease the likelihood of forming this model. Yet, we obtained positive relations between ambivalence to the other and preoccupied attachment.

One potential explanation for this result is that is that preoccupied attachment toward parents reflects mixed perceptions of them, rather than positive perceptions of them and negative views of the self. Indeed, operationalizations of preoccupied attachment are often open to this interpretation. For example, in our research, we adapted Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) Relationship Questionnaire to assess the preoccupied attachment style. Specifically, children indicated the extent to which their father "doesn't want to be as close to me as I want him to be. Sometimes, I worry that he doesn't care about me as much as I care about him." Although affirmative responses to this item may reflect positive feelings about the father and worries about the self (Bartholomew & Griffin, 1994), they could also reflect mixed feelings about the target person. In particular, a child with the preoccupied attachment style might describe his or her father as emotionally distant and uncaring, which are negative traits that would create ambivalence when mixed with other positive traits.

Alternative measures of attachment may help to resolve this issue. Because attachment styles subsume complex metacognitive processes and patterns of emotional self-regulation

(Bowlby, 1980), many different measures of attachment have been proposed (e.g., Bartholomew, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Most recently, Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (2000) reviewed past measures and used item analyses to construct a new measure that is more reliable and valid than the past measures. It is therefore worthwhile to test whether the current results are replicated with this new measure.

It is also worthwhile to utilize alternative measures of ambivalence. Perhaps a measure that explicitly asks participants about their feelings of ambivalence would more strongly predict the attachment styles. Measures that ask participants to report their ambivalence are only moderately correlated with measures that calculate ambivalence from positive and negative responses, and it is possible that the subjective measures tap bases of ambivalence that are untapped by the calculations of ambivalence from positivity and negativity (Priester & Petty, 1996). Nevertheless, given the consistency in our principal findings (e.g., relation between ambivalence to the father and general attachment) across studies, we would be surprised if the current results were not replicated with alternative measures of ambivalence and attachment.

Intergenerational vs. Intragenerational Relations

Together, the results across studies indicate that the relations between ambivalence toward parents and attachment to parents are similar to the relations between ambivalence to partners and attachment to partner. Moreover, perceived relationship quality mediated the effects of ambivalence on secure attachment styles in both types of relationships. Thus, the role of ambivalence in intergenerational, marital relationships is at least partly matched within intergenerational, parent-child relationships.

Nonetheless, these data should not be taken to suggest that there is nothing that distinguishes between intragenerational and intergenerational relationships. One of the most obvious differences between these types of relationships is the differential power status in the

intergenerational relationships. For example, because parents have more power than children in their relationships, the sources of children's ambivalence may frequently reflect this power differential. In our sample, for instance, children sometimes believed that their parents are "bossy." Although people in marital relationships can perceive an imbalance of power in the relationship (e.g., Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983), the negative effects of such asymmetries might be superceded by a communal focus (Mills & Clark, 1994). This focus emphasizes the warmth toward the partner and concern for common welfare, rather than a concern about fair outcomes for each individual. Consequently, the sources of ambivalence in intragenerational, marital relationships may be concerns about warmth and mutual support, whereas the sources of ambivalence in intergenerational parent-child relationships might be concerns about fair treatment and outcomes. Clearly, more research is needed on the sources of ambivalence in both types of relationship.

The Role of Other Attitude Properties

In Study 1 and Study 2, we demonstrated that ambivalence toward the father predicts general secure attachment styles independently of several other attitude properties, including attitudinal inconsistency, embeddedness, and commitment. An interesting issue is whether ambivalence should always exert a unique effect on attachment styles, independently of other attitude properties. Although ambivalence often does exert unique effects on a variety of variables (see Esses & Maio, in press), we suspect that ambivalence will not always do so.

In theory, independent effects of ambivalence should become less likely as people's overall attitudes become extreme. For example, in very close relationships, people may feel so positively toward the other person that their attitudes are mostly nonambivalent and positive. In these close relationships, the presence of any negativity would lead to some ambivalence, resulting in a strong negative relationship between ambivalence and attitude valence. Indeed, we

observed moderate negative correlations between attitude valence and attitude ambivalence in our first two studies. Nonetheless, despite these moderate relations, ambivalence toward the father predicted general secure attachment styles independently of attitude valence.

In other samples, however, the people within a relationship might become so fond of each other that the measures of ambivalence and valence become redundant. In such an event, it is not possible to reveal unique effects of each variable, because of problems of collinearity in regression analyses. Fortunately, in our studies, the thermometer measure of attitude valence was not so strongly related to the measure of ambivalence that collinearity was a problem.

Nonetheless, this issue could potentially arise when the measures of attitude valence and ambivalence are strongly correlated. Consequently, one avenue for future research would assess the unique role of ambivalence using multiple measures of ambivalence and other attitude properties. In this manner, the unique variance attributable to each property can be confidently tapped. Such an approach may reveal that the unique effects of ambivalence are even stronger than we observed.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have described how ambivalence influences psychological attachment to other people. As expected, the findings suggested that children who possess more mixed feelings and beliefs toward a parent develop less secure attachment to other people in general, especially when the children are ambivalent toward their father. In addition, this effect of ambivalence is not attributable to other attitude properties (e.g., evaluative inconsistency) that are somewhat related to ambivalence. Moreover, this relation can be explained by a specific process. In particular, ambivalence toward parents predicts the perceived quality of the relationship between the children and their parents. The perceived quality of their relationship, in turn, predicts attachment to each parent, which predicts general attachment to others when the parent is

the child's father. Thus, intergenerational ambivalence has a broad potential impact on attachment to others.

Interestingly, our evidence suggests that a similar process also occurs in married couples, showing that ambivalence is important for both inter- and intragenerational relationships. This result qualifies the example used at the beginning of our chapter. Not only can parents and children experience a mixture of negative and positive feelings that affect the quality of their affectional bonds, but spouses can similarly experience mixed feelings towards each other," with similar psychological consequences. An essential agenda for future research involves uncovering the antecedents of this ambivalence in both types of relationships, perhaps helping to alleviate problems of relationship conflict and satisfaction at their source.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. This figure is a representation of the chain of events through which ambivalence toward parents affects general attachment to others. The rightmost path applies only to the child-father relationship, and the sign above each arrow represents the direction of the relationship between the variables.

