AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF


Title: Mixed Emotions in Late Life: Older Parents' Experiences of Intergenerational Ambivalence.

Abstract approved: Redacted for Privacy

Interviewing eighteen older parents (aged 65 and older) with two or more children for this project established support for the emotional experience of intergenerational ambivalence. Seventy-five parent-child relationships were discussed. Two major themes arose over what healthy, independently living parents feel ambivalent about in their relationships with their midlife children. The first theme focused on how parents simultaneously felt sadness and pride about the busyness of their children's lives. In some respects, parents sensed themselves left out of their children's everyday life, yet they accepted these feelings with a gratified knowledge that their children were functioning adults in society. The second theme of intergenerational ambivalence that surfaced from the interviews was the issue of respecting and negotiating boundaries around spheres of influence. Parents oscillated between positive and negative feelings and thoughts about the appropriateness of offering advice to children. Parents shared conflicted thoughts about stepping back, allowing their children to live their own lives even if
they disapproved of certain aspects of it. A few parents shared situations when they felt they did interfere and overstepped their right to comment on their children's life decisions. This theme centered around four issues: financial matters, core beliefs of politics and religion, romantic partnerships, and parenting styles. This study also examined management strategies parents used to sort out and think through complex feelings and thoughts about their midlife children. A contribution this project gives to the emergence of intergenerational ambivalence as a theoretical concept of study in parent-child relations over the lifecourse is the experience of older mothers and fathers. I found no evidence parents experienced qualitatively different emotions because of their gender. Instead, the underlying experience of intergenerational ambivalence was very similar for mothers and fathers. From the results presented in this study, mixed emotions seem to be a natural and normative experience in late life. Older parents experienced ambivalence on a psychological level. Conflicting inner thoughts and mixed emotions resulted from everyday interactions and conversations with midlife children.

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Cheryl L. Peters, Author
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I would like to acknowledge the generosity of all the participants in this study. Eighteen parents shared their stories, feelings, and time for the sake of this research project. Each interview was unique. Parents not only answered my questions wholeheartedly, but many also offered me glimmers of wisdom about the meaning of life. Their stories continually remind me of the utmost importance of our relationships with others whom we care about and feel close with, especially our families.

I appreciate the time and energy my committee members invested into this study. I would like to thank Karen Hooker and Anisa Zvonkovic for their guidance, patience, and trust. I would also like to acknowledge the monetary support from the Jo Anne Petersen Family Gerontology Thesis and Travel Awards. I appreciated Alexis Walker’s encouragement to apply for the Petersen Awards. Additionally, Ingrid Arnet Conndidis was the Petersen Visiting Scholar in the spring of 2001 and I will forever treasure our timely conversations about the ambivalence framework.

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Dedicated in Memory of John K. Eschbach, Sr.

My Papa, Our Hero
Human life encompasses a wide range of emotions and experiences. Close relationships are at the heart of emotion and experience. Experiences with others whom we care about provoke our most private feelings, thoughts, and motivations for behavior. Relationships, as well as emotional experiences, are complex. Simultaneous positive and negative sentiments about an individual with whom we are close can wax and wane with time—in a moment, in day, in a year, over a lifetime, beyond physical death. How we handle mixed emotions in our close relationships—with our parents, siblings, intimate partners, and children—creates consequences for our lives and for our well-being.

As social beings, we seek meaningful bonds with others across our lifetime. We form our primary attachments to caregivers at the beginning of life (Bowlby, 1969). These first relationships (most commonly with our parents) set up internal working models of self and others that shape our expectations of family and the social world. Today, family members have more years of shared living than any other time in history (Bengtson, 2001). Increased longevity of individuals results in a verticalization of family structure—with more generations represented along lineage lines. Intergenerational family relationships are important because they provide reciprocal sources of support and emotional connection (Connidis, 2001; Rossi & Rossi, 1990).
As individuals change with time, so do their relationship needs and expectations (Fingerman, 2001). Changes include those associated with normative developmental transitions (e.g., getting married; becoming a parent or grandparent; retirement) as well as those associated with changes in health or financial status. Without periodic negotiation, parent-child relations may become awkward, tenuous, or disconnected in late life (Connidis, 2001; Fingerman, 2001).

Maintaining and negotiating relationships is normal, but how each of us accomplishes this task varies. Trends such as delayed childbearing, longer life expectancy, higher divorce rates, and remarriages that form step relations are examples of novel terrain Americans negotiate within their families (Connidis, 2001). New terrain can be both frightening and exciting to navigate, depending on the experience. For example, Coontz (2000) suggests “ambiguity and inconsistency” are features of family and social change generated from “tradeoffs” rather than simple good or bad adjustments in the family unit (p.285). Complexity in American families has created the necessity of unique negotiations among members and a host of ambivalent experiences worth understanding. It seems possible that parents and children would experience social and relationship forces differently from each other, as would individuals in differing cohorts.

This project sought deeper understanding about mixed emotions that older parents feel in their relationships with their midlife children. A recently suggested theory of *intergenerational ambivalence* has offered intriguing questions for social scientists to investigate. Lüscher & Pillemer (1998) emphasize simultaneous and
mixed feelings inherent in family relations and define intergenerational ambivalence as "contradictions in relationships between parents and adult offspring that cannot be reconciled" (p. 416). Intergenerational ambivalence operates on two dimensions—one that is sociological (on a social-structural level) and another that is psychological (operating on an individual level).

Lüscher and Pillemer's original definition (1998) is broadly conceived and others continue to modify the emerging theory. Researchers, for example, question if differences between people need be irreconcilable to be characterized as ambivalent. Additionally, some question if the theory is aptly termed as intergenerational ambivalence? A term such as interpersonal ambivalence could represent the reality of mixed emotions felt in other kinds of relationships than just those between generations. In 2002, the Journal of Marriage and Family published a series of articles dedicated to the development and public critique of the intergenerational ambivalence framework (Connidis & McMullin; Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry, & Silverstein; Curran; Lüscher). Despite energy focused on the theoretical underpinnings of the framework, few empirical studies exist to date to validate the concepts of ambivalence. We need studies that directly address intergenerational ambivalence to further improve the theory.

Older parents' perspectives are particularly important. Children's lives, and the quality of relationship they have with their aging parents, shapes the identity of the parent and the social integration perceived by the older parent, in a way that is not the same for the adult child (Roberto, Allen, & Blieszner, 1999). Additionally,
a recent study of daily emotional experiences showed that older adults were more likely than younger adults to report having mixed feelings and complex emotions— a feature referred to as “poignancy” in the literature (Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, & Nesselroade, 2000, p. 653). Emotions measured in the study finding older adults experiencing poignancy included: anger, sadness, fear, disgust, embarrassment, shame, irritation, frustration, anxiety, boredom, happiness, joy, contentment, excitement, pride, accomplishment, amusement, and interest. This list of emotions serves as an example of different emotional experiences that researchers could attend to as they analyze data within the ambivalence framework. For example, feeling ambivalent means simultaneously experiencing a positive emotion (pride) coupled with a negative emotion (sadness) in a thought or interaction. Given that emotions are complex, ambivalent experiences— simultaneous feelings of good and bad—are not limited to feeling just one of each. Life can cause us to feel multiple positive and negative emotions at the same time or over the same event. Older parents who feel strongly that their relationships with their midlife children are important to their identity, may likely experience emotional poignancy from these relationships and possibly complex and mixed emotions (ambivalence).

Are there ambivalent experiences for the midlife children? There is some evidence about the uncertainty the middle generation of adult children feels toward their aging parents. For example, the literature depicts caregiving situations or management strategies related to health problems or filial tasks for their parents.
creating ambivalence (Lang, in press; Lorenz-Meyer, 2001; Lüscher & Lettke, 2000). We know very little about how healthy older parents (aged 65+) living independently in the community experience intergenerational ambivalence with their adult children.

The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives and experiences of older parents to inform the theory of intergenerational ambivalence. Specifically, I was interested in what emotions aging parents felt concerning their current-day relationships with all of their children. What in their relationships or in their children's lives or own lives created an experience of ambivalence?

Intentions to build and validate the theoretical ambivalence framework guided the entire process of this research. This study utilized a qualitative approach to examine parents' relationships with their children. A qualitative approach uses words and descriptions of the emotions parents feel during visits, conversations, and in the midst of exchanges of help. Parents discussed frequency and quality of contact, similarities/differences between children, perceived closeness, exchanges of aid, feelings of personal independence, and specific situations of uncertainty and ambivalence in their relationships. Older parent's reflections on the meanings and intent of behaviors they see in their children can inform the ambivalence framework better than setting out predetermined categories. Finally, because there are no established scales for intergenerational ambivalence, an exploratory study is well suited to address the research questions in this study.
Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on the nature of intergenerational ties is vast. Social scientists interested in families have long examined qualities between parents and children across the lifespan (i.e. Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). This literature is voluminous and my goal is to frame this study more narrowly. This literature review starts with a description of the emerging theory of intergenerational ambivalence, followed by a history of ambivalence in the social sciences, and ends with a review of existing empirical evidence for the experience of intergenerational ambivalence. In the conclusion of this section, I give attention to gaps in the literature and missing theoretical links.

Theoretical Perspectives

In many ways, the intergenerational ambivalence framework developed in reaction to family solidarity theory. Family Solidarity as a latent construct (Bengtson 2001; Roberts, Richards, & Bengtson, 1991; Bengtson and Roberts, 1991; Bengtson & Schrader, 1982) has six underlying dimensions that describe intergenerational relationship qualities. Bengtson’s model of solidarity grew out of his study of generations from a longitudinal data set collected at the University of Southern California since 1971. The six solidarity dimensions are titled: affectual, associational, consensual, functional, normative, and structural. They are for the most part indicators of relationship quality and contact. Although family solidarity theory is widely published and internationally known (Parrott & Bengtson, 1999; Starrels, Ingersoll-Dayton, Neal, & Yamada, 1995; Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Huck,
1994), it is not without criticisms. In particular, the solidarity paradigm is over reliant on positive features (cohesiveness) within families and often too narrowly measured (e.g. emotional closeness measured with three Likert-type items). However, the family solidarity model is useful for conceptualizing aspects of parent-child relationships that are important.

Intergenerational ambivalence is a research framework that examines complexity in parent-child relationships over time (Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998). It emerged from dissatisfaction with other, more traditional frameworks (notably the family solidarity perspective) that focus exclusively on cohesion or conflict among family members (Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Lowenstein & Katz, 2001). An ambivalence framework accounts for a realistic assessment of negative and positive experiences among kin. A focus on simultaneous, mixed emotions is a move away from both the overly positive approach that relies on measuring the strengths of a family, as well as the alternative approach emphasizing family problems (Connidis and McMullin, 2002). Intergenerational ambivalence as a framework allows for examination of confusion, mixed sentiment, and unsettled arrangements in relationships (Lüscher, 2002; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998).

The intergenerational ambivalence framework has strong roots in Symbolic Interactionist (SI) theory (Mead, 1934) and components from the conflict perspectives (Marxist and Feminist). Some researchers have linked structural ambivalence to similar ideas found in role theory (Bengtson, et. al, 2002) that is an offshoot of symbolic interactionism. Additionally, SI theorists often utilize
qualitative methods to study socially constructed meanings that are extracted from stories, language and expressed feelings. Observational techniques note behaviors throughout interaction. Researchers who follow a symbolic interaction tradition today are more apt to consider themselves social constructionists or simply qualitative researchers, rather than Symbolic Interactionists (George, 1996; 2001).

A symbolic interaction theoretical orientation is uniquely suited to handle the complex, simultaneous occurrence of emotions. Cooley’s “looking-glass-self” (1956/1909), in which self-reflective processes operate to construct meaning, illustrates the good “fit” between Symbolic Interaction theory and the explanation of ambivalence. For example, consider a father and his daughter. The father is thinking about what he is saying and about what he is going to say while communicating with his daughter. In turn, the father is also aware of the reactions from his daughter and others. This causes the father to modify words and actions as necessary. The father’s motivation is to stay in line with a desired projection of self. His emotional reactions, thoughts, and behaviors are based on the perception of what he believes his daughter thought of him. What makes this so complicated are the internal states, perceptions, and the reciprocal connection between the father and daughter over time. Additionally, the daughter is also thinking about how the father is viewing her and she too modifies her actions and words as needed.

All of this meaning negotiated inside the individual minds comes across in conversations, behavioral expressions, and interpretations of others. Thus, the
social creation of our feelings and shared meanings continually shift from interaction to interaction. With all of this perception and covert motivation underway, those we know best or for the longest periods in our life represent special situations, because an accumulation of interactions over time can create much to negotiate.

The key element in Symbolic Interaction is interaction. Behavior can be unpredictable because intentions, motivations, and meanings differ by individuals (George, 2001). A purpose of using SI theory in this project is to get at micro events when a person acts as "the architect of their life-course trajectory" (George, 1996, p. 252). Individuals act with agency and are dynamic creators of everyday life and family interaction. This project explores interaction from the perspective of one individual involved in a number of dyadic relationships, specifically how parents view their relationships with each of their children. The micro events of interaction are conversations, visits, exchanges of help, and memories of the past that are still relevant to how they act and respond to each other today.

*Two Dimensions of Ambivalence*

As referred to earlier, there are two dimensions of ambivalence—sociological and psychological—and together they form a comprehensive construct. Lüscher and Pillemer (1998) map out the psychological experience of ambivalence as a subjective experience of mixed or torn emotions, cognitions, and motivations for behaviors in a dyadic relationship. Connidis and McMullin (2002) refute that only relationships with others create ambivalent experiences, and posit
that social-structural conditions (i.e. employment status; gender) place real constraints on how individuals can act with agency and consequently create ambivalent situations for people to negotiate.

Many ideas for the original submission by Lüscher and Pillemer (1998) came from a 1963 paper by sociologists Merton and Barber. Both papers (Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998; Merton & Barber, 1963) suggest examining the norms and counter-norms individuals hold to capture the experience of ambivalence. It also agreed upon that times of transitions might provide the best window to view a person's conflicting beliefs. Yet, these ideas may reflect an image that ambivalence is a negative feature and only experienced during times of distress and change; not all researchers endorse this opinion.

This project views intergenerational ambivalence as normative. I take a non-stigmatizing approach to examining ambivalence in close relationships. Ambivalence is not necessarily a negative experience. Ambivalence provides researchers with new language to examine the inherent complexity of human emotions. Human interaction is riddled with the simultaneous experience of positive and negative emotions or conflicting thoughts and uncertainty. Understanding ambivalence in intergenerational relations gives us an opportunity to normalize the occurrence of mixed emotions. By defining ambivalence as a normative feature of parent-child relations in late life, individuals can learn that mixed emotions are healthy, and not dysfunctional. People can realize that feeling mixed emotions is natural and does not necessarily indicate an estranged or
indifferent relationship. Thompson and Holmes (1996) suggest, “a moderate level of ambivalence may be indicative of a balanced, realistic assessment” in close relationships (p. 502). If people understand ambivalence as a normal feature of parent-child relationships, then they can plan for possible mixed sentiments and may cope better when situations are complex, unresolved, or upsetting.

Different disciplines have applied the concept of ambivalence for scientific study at different points in time, with varying success.

Ambivalence as a Social Science Construct

The concept of ambivalence itself has a long history in the social sciences. Eugene Bleuler introduced “ambivalence” as a concept for scientific study in 1911 stemming from his work on schizophrenia. Yet, many are quick to note that ambivalence as a human experience predates any one scientist and is depicted in classic literary works (for a historical review see Lüscher, 2002). Sigmund Freud’s theoretical work (1912/1958) proposed ambivalence as the co-existence of love for objects (developing relationships) and destruction of objects (relationship abuse) while battling life and death desires to satisfy the id (Freud, 1950). Anna Freud, Sigmund’s daughter, began work on how ambivalence relates to personality development and she introduced ideas of guilt and the individuals’ self-recognition of conflicting emotions.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, empirical evidence linked the experience of ambivalence to depression, feelings of worthlessness, guilt, and anxiety (Raulin & Brenner, 1993). Ambivalence studied on the individual or...
internal states level has concluded that having conflicting emotions is unhealthy. Even the word conflicting connotes negativity and highlights the possible detrimental effects of experiencing internal ambivalence. However, when ambivalence as a construct expanded to studies beyond testing clinical samples, new interpretations emerged. Researchers started to conceptualize ambivalence as mixed emotions and studied the construct in the context of dyadic, close relationships. When researchers examined ambivalence on a relationship level they discovered the experience of mixed emotions was more common and frequent than once believed. For example, relationship ambivalence is documented as a normal feature in intimate relationship formations during early adulthood (Braiker & Kelley, 1979; Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 2000), among sibling ties in middle adulthood (Bedford, 1989), and most recently in parent-child dyads across the lifespan (Kingston, Ray, Phillips, 2000; Lorenz-Meyer, 2001; Pillemer & Suitor, 2002).

**Measurement Issues for the Construct of Ambivalence**

Lettke (2001) notes three measurement dimensions of ambivalence—frequency, duration, and evaluation. Frequency is simply how often one experiences ambivalence. Duration is best thought of as cycles of ambivalence, not just how frequent, but are there time sequences or certain life periods associated with more or less ambivalent experiences? Evaluation is the meaning that the individual attaches to the mixed experiences, not the meaning or value attributed by the researcher. Lettke (2001) mentions four different levels of analysis that an
investigator could use to examine the occurrence of ambivalence in intergenerational ties: (a) individuals report on how they feel or think, (b) individual reports on the relationship, (c) dyadic reports on the relationship, and (d) direct observation of interactions.

Curran argues (2002) that level of analysis—structural, dyadic, or individual—in research designs related to ambivalence studied in intergenerational ties must be clear. Lüscher (2002), for instance, organizes his conceptualizations around the individual and the relationship, while Connidis and McMullin (2002a) favor the structural level of analysis. Investigators must specify the level they are examining for their work to be helpful in building or strengthening the current ambivalence framework. This project examined individual’s reports on their relationships.

The Middle Generation’s Ambivalence

To date, not many published empirical studies are available on the topic of intergenerational ambivalence. We know the most about experiences of the middle-aged generation. Findings suggest that grown children of aging parents frequently endure mixed emotions related to the caregiving needs of their parents, especially in filial tasks (Lang, in press). Lang was working on ambivalence from an individual level. From a cluster analysis of 115 adult offspring, four patterns of relationship styles were revealed: detached-distant, strained-altruistic, close-supportive, and resilient-giving. The four types of relationships predicted the likelihood of giving care (e.g. consistent help with activities of daily living) to
aging parents. A limitation to this study was that none of the relationship types could be "characterized by simultaneous co-existence of both emotional closeness and perceived conflict" (ambivalent). Lang (in press) suggested future studies exploring intergenerational ambivalence use methods that can capture a more multifaceted and complex account of experiences. Qualitative research methods are well-suited to capture such experiences.

Even in studies of caregiving anticipation, the middle-generation report their mixed feelings over finding potential solutions for future concerns about their parents (Fingerman, 2001; Lang, in press; Lorenz-Meyer, 2001). Lorenz-Meyer's study validated ambivalence on a structural level of analysis. Men and women adult children face a social dilemma in potentially meeting the needs of their aging or sick parents. Educational and career attainment further complicate the situation and the tradeoffs become increasingly difficult to assess as parent's needs for care and attention become real, rather than anticipated, and no longer avoidable. Lorenz-Meyer found support for adult children "repressing" thoughts about caregiving anticipation because of overwhelming feelings of pressure and anguish given that most saw irresolvable solutions in meeting future parental care (e.g., felt ambivalent and emotionally polarized). Structural situations (i.e. work status, marital status, parental status) of children affect their thoughts and feelings about their intergenerational relations.

How would older parent's structurally situated factors (i.e. retirement, martial status, health condition) influence their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors in
relationships with their children? How might older parents act when feeling ambivalent? Are parents and children keeping ambivalent experiences to themselves, hesitant how others will react to their mixed emotions?

*The Older Generation's Ambivalence*

Actually, we do not know much about the experiences of healthy aging parents in terms of their experiences of intergenerational ambivalence. Fingerman (1996; 2001) has done some interesting qualitative work with individual and dyadic interviews on 48 pairs of aging mothers and adult daughters. Fingerman explored mixed emotions present in their relationships. The dyads were not co-residing and not involved in a fixed caregiving situation. Fingerman's work is especially useful because she captured the mixed emotions both generations felt in their relationship.

Fingerman (2001) presents the “developmental schism” (p. 77) as a concept that arose out of her study as important to consider when understanding positive and negative features in a relationship between two generations. She describes the complex, mixed emotions as conflict and disagreement intermingled with love, respect, and intimacy between the pairs. Fingerman (2001) suggests that each individual brings different needs, desires, and expectations to the relationship that correlate with the age and generational position of the individual. Furthermore, just age and generational differences alone do not cause problems in a relationship, instead problems arise “when the developmental needs of one individual conflict with the needs of the other” (p.80). For example, a mother may
act attentive and concerned for her daughter’s well-being over the course of her life, in fact her daughter may even perceive her mother as a “worrier” but enjoys her mother’s concerns because it is viewed as motherly love. Yet, when the daughter becomes a mother herself, and thereby makes her mother a new grandmother, the daughter’s and mother’s developmental positions have changed. The daughter’s needs and expectations are transforming with her new position as a mother. The daughter may become irritated or annoyed with the once appreciated worry of her own mother. These perceptions and latent changes in the relationship may play out during interactions among the mother, daughter, and new baby. Perhaps interactions that were once comforting now seem overbearing. Individual and relationship needs change over time. Negotiation, management, and adjustment are necessary in long-term relationships to stay connected. An example of a nondevelopmental issue that occurs in parent-child relations over time is “complaints about the other’s habits, traits, or general behavior” (Fingerman, 1996, p.594). Nondevelopmental issues influence relationships as commonly as developmental differences.

Pyke’s (1999) qualitative work on hidden power dynamics in parent-child relations indicated that some individuals may act reluctant in expressing desires or may hold back opinions in efforts to avoid conflict. The older parents may even monitor giving advice, because they are careful not to stir up ill feelings from their offspring (Pyke, 1999). This idea is similar to the notion of generational stake that suggests aging members of family units limit negative expressions and tend to
view relationships more positively than younger members, due to unequal regard for the connections between generations. Parents feel much more generational or developmental stake for their offspring, than is true in the reverse (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Hagestad 1982). In fact, Pyke’s (1999) study involved interviews from three generations within a family, and there was evidence that the older generation was unaware of resentment or ill-feelings associated with them from other family members; overall, parents reported relationships as more harmonious than they really were according to their children. In the parent’s view, they often stayed out of personal affairs of their children to promote family harmony.

Finally, Pillemer and Suitor (2002) used a quantitative dataset to examine older mother’s experiences of intergenerational ambivalence. It appears that failure of adult children to achieve and maintain normal adult statuses (i.e. marriage; financial independence) is a source of ambivalence for mothers (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002). A weakness in this study was the operationalization of ambivalence. They measured ambivalence with five items. Two global items assessed how often mothers felt “torn in two directions or conflicted” and had “very mixed feelings” toward their child. Three other items asked how often they got on each other’s nerves, how intimate but restrictive the relationship was, and the degree they felt indifferent towards each other. Half of the sample ($N = 189$) did agree or strongly agree with one or more of the ambivalence statements, thus providing general support or face validity for the intergenerational ambivalence framework.
Gaps in the Literature and Missing Theoretical Threads

Empirical validation of the ambivalence framework is underway. Researchers have been quick to establish the phenomena for the middle-aged generation and are diligently working on the measurement components for studies on intergenerational ambivalence (Lettke, 2001; Lüscher, 2002; Lüscher & Lettke, 2000). It is true that to date, the strongest picture of ambivalence has emerged from accounts given by the middle-generation. We know little about the experience of ambivalence from the perspective of older parents. Although studies have found older mothers experiencing intergenerational ambivalence or mixed emotions (Fingerman, 2001; Pillemer & Suitor, 2002) and avoiding overt conflict to spare ill feelings among family (Pyke, 1999), we do not know if the same is true for older fathers. We need perspectives from both fathers and mothers because gender is an important lens through which experiences are interpreted and given meaning.

What emotions are involved in experiencing intergenerational ambivalence? This question is unexamined in the literature. Because the study of ambivalence is a newly emerging area, it is underdeveloped. Thus, it is appropriate to begin work in this area with an exploratory qualitative study designed to elicit experiences of ambivalence. We need to know what mixed emotions older parents experience and over what realms of life they have conflicted thoughts in their relationships with their midlife children. Parents that are confronting struggles and uncertainty related to their own aging, but still living independently in the
community, may express unique perspectives that can inform the ambivalence framework. Through conversations with older parents, the simultaneous experience of positive and negative feelings concerning children’s lives, their own lives, and their relationships with their midlife children may emerge.

**Summary**

Previous research on generational stake, hidden power in relationships, and mixed emotions in parent-child relations in late life leaves one to expect that displays of ambivalence may be more subtle for older generations. Ambivalence in general is difficult to observe with survey techniques, due to the inconsistent and simultaneous nature of experiencing mixed emotions (Curran, 2002; Connidis & McMullin, 2002). Lüscher & Pillemer (1998) suggest that researchers triangulate the concept of intergenerational ambivalence by holding measurement and theoretical considerations together tightly and including multiple measures in any one design to tap ambivalence. In addition, researchers are urged to pursue the study of ambivalence with both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Quantitative and qualitative methods do not need to complement or supplement each other, as much as they should feed into each other and redirect lines of research as necessary (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The qualitative project presented here evokes the experiences of older parents (mothers and fathers) with all of their adult children. A strong focus on emotions and relationship qualities in the experiences of intergenerational ambivalence on an individual level guided the research efforts.
Research Questions

This project set out to answer four research questions:

1. Is intergenerational ambivalence experienced by older parents (65+) in their relationships with their midlife children?

2. What are the mixed emotions of intergenerational ambivalence experienced by older parents?

3. Are experiences of intergenerational ambivalence different across children within families?

4. How do older parents manage the experience of ambivalent situations or feelings?
Sample

I conducted in-depth qualitative research interviews with parents who were at least 65 years of age and had two or more living adult children. Stepchildren did not count as the two children necessary toward meeting the criteria, but stepchildren were not excluded from the interview if the parent chose to discuss them. Only one eligible person from a married couple could be a participant, to eliminate the same relationships discussed twice in the project interviews and to keep independent observations for each family. Participants came from two counties in Oregon. Assisted-living and nursing home residents were not included in the sample. Only community-dwelling, independent older parents not coresiding with extended family or in caregiving situations were in the sample. I actively recruited participants from local fitness centers, senior volunteers groups, retirement community centers, and church groups. Snowball sampling was successful as willing participants brought new respondents into the study.

These recruitment strategies resulted in a convenience sample of 18 parents (9 mothers and 9 fathers). Data from one mother who participated in the study was excluded from analysis and her interview was not transcribed because she was currently living with her daughter; this information was missed during the telephone screen. Seventeen interviews (8 mothers and 9 fathers) were utilized for data analysis. I assigned pseudonyms for all respondents to use in the project’s
analysis and identifying information on their children (i.e. place of employment, last names) was omitted from transcripts.

The average age of mothers and fathers in this study were 76 and 75, respectively. Marital status varied for the mothers (2 were married, 4 were widowed, and 2 were divorced), but all the fathers in the study were married (two fathers remarried). Parents discussed 75 relationships with children during the interviews and the parents ranged from having 2 to 12 children each. Biological offspring accounted for 65 of the relationships discussed, 2 children were adopted, and 8 children were technically step-children. However, both of the fathers reporting step-relations as full kin had been remarried for 21 and 22 years, respectively. Half of the 75 children lived out of state (39 children, 52%), providing an interesting contrast to those living closer to their parents. Two of the 75 children discussed were deceased.

Table 1 provides demographic information for the study participants and their children discussed in the interviews. The first column displays pseudonyms for participants, their age, marital status, and the Oregon county they resided in at the time of the interview. The second column features the gender and age of each child within the family listed. Other columns identify the marital and parental status of each child. The last column provides a work occupation title for the children. I did not intend to collect information on the work status of children discussed by parents, but these details came out of interviews as important.
### Table 1
Demographics for Study Participants and their Children Discussed in the Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Age, Martial Status, and Co. Residence in Oregon</th>
<th>Gender and Age of Children</th>
<th>Marital Status of Children</th>
<th>Parental Status of Children</th>
<th>Work Occupation of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANDY, 70, Married, Benton</td>
<td>Son, age 43</td>
<td>Remarried</td>
<td>Yes – 5</td>
<td>Computer Industry &amp; Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son, age 41</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>High School Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son, age 38</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>(Unemployed/Part-time work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BILL, 75, Married, Benton</td>
<td>Son, age 40</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 1</td>
<td>Computer Programmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son, age 39</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter, age 38</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>Business Owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHUCK, 72, Married, Linn</td>
<td>Daughter, age 47</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son, age 45</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Truck Dispatcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son, age 43</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Environmental Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter, age 41</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Truck Dispatcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter, age 40</td>
<td>Remarried</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>(Incarcerated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter, age 38</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>(Currently on Medical Leave)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant’s Age, Martial Status, and Co. Residence in Oregon</td>
<td>Gender and Age of Children</td>
<td>Marital Status of Children</td>
<td>Parental Status of Children</td>
<td>Work Occupation of Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son, age 47</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 3</td>
<td>Computer Industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son, age 44</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>Nuclear Reservation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter, age 40</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son, age 38</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 1</td>
<td>Banker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter, age 37</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fitness Trainer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son, age 35</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter, age 32</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 3</td>
<td>Nanny</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son, age 30</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>Yes – 1</td>
<td>Food Industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son, age 28</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Artist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son, age 25</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>Yes – 1</td>
<td>Caregiver</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son, age 23</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Banking Field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son, age 23</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Actor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARK 70, Married, Benton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant’s Age, Martial Status, and Co. Residence in Oregon</td>
<td>Gender and Age of Children</td>
<td>Marital Status of Children</td>
<td>Parental Status of Children</td>
<td>Work Occupation of Children</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JERRY, 70, Married, Benton</td>
<td>Son, age 44</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>Business</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Son, age 42</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 1</td>
<td>Non-Profit Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son, age 35</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Grad Student – MBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter, age 29</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Grad Student – Ph.D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>HENRY, 86, Remarried, Benton</td>
<td>Daughter, age 58</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Auditor for IRS—Retiring soon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son, age 52</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 1</td>
<td>Forest Manager for Electric Co.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son, age 50</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 4</td>
<td>V.P. Software Systems</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Daughter, age 51</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 3</td>
<td>(Not working by Choice)</td>
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<td>Son, age 49</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>High School Teacher</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Son, age 48</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 1</td>
<td>Veterinarian</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Son, age 46</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 1</td>
<td>Municipal Manager</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Son, age 44</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>Bank Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant's Age, Martial Status, and Co. Residence in Oregon</td>
<td>Gender and Age of Children</td>
<td>Marital Status of Children</td>
<td>Parental Status of Children</td>
<td>Work Occupation of Children</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BOB</strong> 71, Married, Benton</td>
<td>Daughter, age 43</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>Biochemistry Scientist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter, age 41</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 3</td>
<td>Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son, age 39</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>Chief Financial Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MICK</strong> 67, Remarried, Linn</td>
<td>Daughter, age 39</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 3</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Daughter, age 37</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Business Manager</td>
</tr>
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<td>Daughter, age 35</td>
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<td>Son, age 33</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 1</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
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<td>Son, age 31</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Daughter, age 29</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Army Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JOHN</strong> 82, Married, Benton</td>
<td>Son, deceased</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son, age 52</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>(Unemployed/Part-time work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son, age 48</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant's Age, Martial Status, and Co. Residence in Oregon</td>
<td>Gender and Age of Children</td>
<td>Marital Status of Children</td>
<td>Parental Status of Children</td>
<td>Work Occupation of Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **MARIE**  
72, Remarried, Benton | Daughter, age 50 | Divorced | Yes – 2 | Dancer/Artist |
|  | Daughter, age 45 | Married | Yes – 2 | Works with Elderly |
|  | Daughter, age 43 | Married | Yes – 1 | Business |
| **MARGE**  
70, Divorced, Linn | Son, age 41 | Single | No | Landscaping Manager |
|  | Daughter, age 38 | Divorced | No | Pastry Chef |
|  | Son, age 37 | Married | Yes – 2 | Warehouse Manager |
|  | Daughter, age 32 | Divorced | Yes – 3 | (Unknown) |
| **INGRID**  
83, Widowed, Linn | Son, age 60 | Married | Yes – 2 | Microbiologist—Retiring soon |
|  | Daughter, age 57 | Married | Yes – 1 | Cemetery Manager |
|  | Daughter, age 51 | Divorced | Yes – 2 | Pastor |
|  | Daughter, age 49 | Remarried | Yes – 3 | Secretary |
| **JEAN**  
71, Widowed, Linn | Daughter, age 40 | Partner | No | International Trade Exporter |
|  | Son, age 36 | Married | Yes – 1 | Trade Exporter |
Table 1, Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Age, Martial Status, and Co. Residence in Oregon</th>
<th>Gender and Age of Children</th>
<th>Marital Status of Children</th>
<th>Parental Status of Children</th>
<th>Work Occupation of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EMMA</strong> 79, Widowed, Linn</td>
<td>Son, age 55</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>Retired High School Teacher</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Son, age 47</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>School Administrator</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Daughter, age 46</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 1</td>
<td>Part-time Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter, age 45</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Water Treatment Worker</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter, age 35</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>(Unknown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FRANCES</strong> 76, Widowed, Benton</td>
<td>Son, age 48</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>(Unemployed/Mental handicap)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son, age 44</td>
<td>Remarried</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Long-Haul Truck Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HELEN</strong> 73, Divorced, Linn</td>
<td>Daughter, deceased</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Yes – 3</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son, age 51</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son, age 50</td>
<td>Remarried</td>
<td>Yes – 3</td>
<td>Park Ranger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter, age 49</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>Disposal Company Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JUDITH</strong> 86, Married, Benton</td>
<td>Son, age 55</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>University Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son, age 52</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
<td>Business/Store Owner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection Process

Interviews lasted between 45 and 120 minutes in a one-to-one format, with the average interview being 75 minutes. Interviews were transcribed from the tape-recorded conversations verbatim. I recorded affect displayed during the interviews by the parents in parentheses during the transcribing process. Recording affect was a critical step for analyzing emotional experiences. Affect was noticeable by the tone of voice and facial expressions during the interviews and was also recalled from field notes taken after each interview.

Fingerman’s (2001) list of emotions from her project with older mothers and daughters was tested in a pilot interview conducted during the development of the interview protocol. The participant had difficulty responding to the list. Upon reflection, it seemed disconnected to go from a conversation to a checklist. It was decided that for this project, emotion would be coded from the interviews. This project used a method of follow-up question probes aimed at getting the participant’s to specify experienced emotions in their own words.

Interview Protocol

Parents were questioned about their relationships with all their children, making within-family analyses possible. The questioning format allowed the participant to answer about whom they chose (see Appendix A for the Interview Guide). Follow-up probes asked the parent to consider others not mentioned in the responses. Parents discussed the frequency of contact, perceived relationship closeness, exchanges of instrumental aid, and physical distance or proximity.
between themselves and their children. Many other questions focused on emotions and time spent together. Near the end of the interview, parents responded if feeling independent was important to them, why, and what they do to stay active and living on their own. Bringing independence into the discussion opened avenues for exploring hidden and mixed emotions related to family, such as a willingness to ask for help and the desire for more contact with grown children and grandchildren.

Analytic Strategies

Qualitative analysis techniques (Berg, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) guided the coding of interviews to uncover themes. I listened for patterns during the entire qualitative process. Examination of emerging themes began with the first interview, and I modified questions slightly with each interview session. For example, two questions were added to the interview protocol during the process: What do you do to stay independently living on your own? Do your children do things together, outside of visits with you? These two questions became natural links in the discussion to other areas of the interview. Similar to adding additional questions, some questions were not asked in every interview because they were irrelevant. For instance, during the portion of the interview that help exchanges between the generations was the focus, some parents were adamant that they did not receive nor give help to their children, making it difficult to continue with the several probes in this section.
In many ways, data analysis began before finalizing all transcripts. After transcribing the interviews, I listened to the tapes and re-read over transcripts to check for errors. I printed the 17 transcripts and read them. As I made passes through the qualitative data I highlighted text sections that illustrated key points and that had potential to use as quotes in the following analysis. I had a running stack of eight memos on which I wrote comments and page numbers referring to quotes, as I read the interviews repeatedly. The use of memos in qualitative analysis is a technique suggested by others (Berg, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The memo system worked well as I collated my field notes and observations with feedback from others about the project’s findings.

See Appendix B for a list of the eight memos that the current analysis narrowed down to for this project. Data reduction continued with each sweep of the interviews and the creation of various charts helped organize the project’s information as results emerged. Another person familiar with the project goals (Dr. Karen Hooker) read all of the transcripts and we discussed key themes and quotes to illustrate these themes.
Chapter 4
RESULTS

This research project sought to understand the extent to which older parents felt ambivalence in their relationships with their midlife children, over what realms of life they had such thoughts and feelings, and how mixed emotions were experienced. Two overarching themes from data analysis provide evidence for the psychological and sociological experience of intergenerational ambivalence, as expressed by the parents. The first is a theme of *busyness of children*, the second is a theme related to the *respect and negotiation of boundaries around spheres of influence* between the generations. Descriptions of mixed emotions appeared in different parts of the interviews, and the actual emotional content was subtle and dispersed. Even so, a few participants did express intense emotions around specific areas of conversation, such as illnesses and deaths of family members. The following quote from a father in the sample highlighted what feeling ambivalent might mean to an older parent:

It’s dynamic. There was real disappointment in the way (some children) were directing their lives, or were not directing their lives. But that’s changed. Now I don’t feel that disappointment. Maybe a little sadness. That they were not living up to a certain standard of their siblings, or what society says they ought to be. My main concern, you know, I’m 70. I don’t know how much longer I am going to live. I was just hoping to see that everybody was able to find a little piece of happiness and get a little sense of direction, and do something for someone besides themselves, for themselves, and for someone other than themselves. So it’s a concern, I guess, where it’s negative, it’s more sadness, than disappointment. And it’s real happiness the other way around, so I feel happy and sad. My life isn’t changing that much. But their lives are changing a lot. And so I can’t really say that I feel one way toward them, maybe at a certain age I’d feel one way, then three months later, they’d be different. I’d be different.
THEME: Busyness of Children

The theme of busyness came out of discussions about the frequency and quality of visits with children, as well as in discussions on exchanges of help. Responses were similar for mothers and fathers. Parents overwhelmingly portrayed their children as busy. Parents’ narratives about quality time spent with children was coupled with a desire for more time together. Parents’ wishes for more contact in visiting or in conversation with children all distilled to a fundamental recognition of children’s lives as busy. To describe the busyness theme, I will start with descriptions of what quality time feels like and what it includes, as described by the parents in my sample. An analysis of frequency of contact between the two generations follows. This sets the stage for exposing the subtle, but strongly stated paradox of the experience of time, reported by parents. The paradox is clear as you hear how simply parents describe and define quality time with adult children and then match those definitions to their reported frequency of such moments with their children.

The majority of the results for this theme included a close examination of the repeated phrase, “they’re so busy”. I heard explicit statements related to “so busy”, or “too busy” from 14 of the 17 parents. The other three parents also had examples about the pace of their children’s lives, saying things like, “it’s hard to catch her and the kids” (Marie) and it is “hard to get a hold of him. But usually I can get him on his cell phone, in between offices” (John). I also examined how the
parents felt about their children being so busy and the reasons the parents ascribed for the busyness of their children.

Describing Quality Time Together

Parents most frequently described quality time with their children as talking and having meaningful conversation, just being together, doing a project, or having a meal together. Most parents thought any time with children could be classified as quality time, in one way or another. Descriptions of quality time did not focus so much on what they were doing, as it did on the fact that they were doing something together. A father of 12 children, Mark, said, “I think hanging out. Taking walks and talking. Ya, I think environments for talking. and just being, not really doing anything.” Some mothers talked about a joy in shopping, even if they bought nothing, because it was time spent walking, talking, and looking at things. Some fathers shared stories of helping children fix up their homes with renovation projects and enjoying time in afternoons and on weekends with the kids. Andy shared his opinion about quality time with his sons: Most of the time, to me, quality time is when we are doing something together. It kind of disgusts my wife sometimes, she’ll say, ‘well, what did you talk about?’ and I’ll say nothing. ‘Hand me that hammer, or I need some more nails, or I need the saw, or would you hold this up for me’. To me, that is quality time. We are working together, and incidentally we may talk about some things... I think, all three of my sons respect that. Now my wife, if she were there, she would ask questions. (laughs)

Some parents talked about doing outdoor activities with their children when they visited in the Northwest, including camping, fishing and crabbing, and sightseeing. Bill, whose three children all live out of the state, said “we’re an outdoors
family...there is always something going on, it’s not like we sit around and watch a movie or television or something like that. We are always doing something.” A mother of two children living an hour and a half away, Jean, said quality time with her children is when they come down, usually on Sunday, to go out to eat for a few hours and chat. When I asked her if she thought her children saw those same dinners as quality time with her, she replied with a smile, “I don’t know how they feel about it. They come back.” Henry questioned the meaning of quality time with his children in responding to what quality time feels like: “I don’t quite know that all the time I spend with them is quality time. I have to say. Because none of it is ever just being in each other’s presence.”

Gender of the parent did seem to shape their meaning of quality time with children. It appeared that fathers were more likely to do activities with children, and they appreciated time spent in joint projects and during sightseeing daytrips. Mothers spoke fondly of good conversation and meals shared in a comfortable atmosphere. However, three fathers also enjoyed just being with children versus doing something and two mothers yearned for more active visits with children, such as undertaking yard projects together. I did not explicitly or systematically ask parents if they preferred active project-focused visits or relaxed-informal visits with their children, so it is unknown for sure if this preference varied by gender of parent or varied by individual temperament.

Overall, statements about quality time together were simple. Most parents preferred low-key events and activities that allowed for meaningful conversation
and time to just be together. Frances sums up her thoughts about a quality visit with her son, "the conversation is usually easy, and two-way. And often we go out to have a meal together while they are here in town." There was also a sense that any time together was better than no time spent visiting each other. Judith notes, "I love to share in their experiences when I can, or just hear about them." This statement, and others like it, reflects a desire and a delight in just knowing what children are up to in their everyday lives. Marie mentioned she feels the most comfortable talking with her youngest daughter because she has a notion of what her life is like in the everyday. Marie explained: "seeing that I talk to Anne more often, we have more of a, overall knowing what’s going on connection." Mick would agree that this connection is true with his children, "I think that if you can just be with them. Be relaxed." Helen cheerfully responded to the question about what quality time feels like as she remarked, "just the idea that they thought enough to call me up and talk!"

The experience of quality time spent with children may also have a lasting effect on the parents. Quality time could be visits or meaningful conversations. Long after they were over and the children were back to their own routines, the parents still felt connected and comfortable allowing quite some time without hearing from them again. What the parents expressed as quality time with children was simple: quality time is just being together, talking, and knowing what the other is doing.
In examining frequency of contact between the generations, it is fair to consider how far apart the children and parents were from one another. Distance made all the difference for many families. For children that were living outside of the state, most parents reported seeing them at the very most four times a year, but this frequency was high compared to the other parents who had children out of state and saw them once every couple of years. The average frequency of contact with children residing out of state from their parents was one to two visits a year. Typically, the generations saw each other during one visit in the summer and another around the holidays, especially for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

For children who were residing in state, the frequency of contact between them and their parents averaged about once a month to every other month. A few parents saw children who resided in their same town as often as five times a week, but others with children in town still only saw their children on average, once a month.

Describing frequency of contact is complicated because parents reported averages of how often they see each of their children. Table 2 breaks down the frequency of contact for all the children within each family. The first column displays the parent’s pseudonym and gender of children. The second column lists the state of residence for each child; all parents resided in Linn or Benton counties of Oregon. The remaining two columns list how often the generations visit each other and communicate by either telephone or email. Table 2 responses do not have standardized frequencies because I allowed the parents to respond in ways...
Table 2

Frequency of Contact and Children’s Residence by State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent and Children</th>
<th>State Residency of Child</th>
<th>How often Generations Visit Each Other</th>
<th>How often Generations Communicate (Phone/Email)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Every two weeks</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Once every few years</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>Every other year</td>
<td>Regularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Few times a year</td>
<td>Every couple of weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>Once in a while</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Rarely to never</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>S. Carolina</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>Sometimes email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>S. Carolina</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Rarely to never</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Four times a year</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>Sometimes email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>Once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Twice a year</td>
<td>Every few months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>Once or twice a year</td>
<td>Every few weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>Every few weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Every few months</td>
<td>Once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>Once or twice a year</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2, Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent and Children</th>
<th>State Residency of Child</th>
<th>How often Generations Visit Each Other</th>
<th>How often Generations Communicate (Phone/Email)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>John</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Three times a month</td>
<td>Once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Three times a year</td>
<td>Every other month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mark</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Every other year</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Twice a year</td>
<td>Very often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Three to four times a year</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Few times a year</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter Son</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>Every few months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter Son</td>
<td>Outside U.S.</td>
<td>Not often</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter Son</td>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>Every other week</td>
<td>Every few months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Never (estranged)</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>Two to three times a year</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Never (estranged)</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mick</strong></td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Every other year</td>
<td>Every other week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Two to three times a year</td>
<td>Every other week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>Never (estranged)</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Twice a year</td>
<td>Once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emma</strong></td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter Son</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Every other month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Every other month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Helen</strong></td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Few times a year</td>
<td>Every few weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Every other month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Every other month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Every other month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2, Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent and Children</th>
<th>State Residency of Child</th>
<th>How often Generations Visit Each Other</th>
<th>How often Generations Communicate (Phone/Email)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frances Son Son</td>
<td>Oregon Oregon</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean Daughter Son</td>
<td>Oregon Oregon</td>
<td>Three/five times a year</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingrid Son Daughter Daughter</td>
<td>Alaska Oregon Oregon</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>Once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judith Son Son</td>
<td>Washington, D.C. Oregon</td>
<td>Once or twice a year Every other month</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marge Son Daughter Son Daughter</td>
<td>Colorado California Oregon California</td>
<td>Every few years Once a year Every other month</td>
<td>Few times a year Every other month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Marie Daughter Daughter Daughter | Washington California Texas | Four times a year Once or twice a year Every other month | Once or twice a month Every other month


that made sense to them. This table is helpful for thinking about each parent and organizing how frequently they are in contact with their midlife children. For example, it is not reasonable to assume that parents were withstanding long periods of no contact from any children, but instead, it is clearer to think of the frequency of contact rotating among the children. Just as with Table 1, Table 2 will also be useful to reference back to as the words and experiences of particular parents are illustrated.

Many of the children resided in neighboring states of Washington and California. While this still created some barriers for visitations, more frequent visitation was associated with parents and children who lived within driving distance. Some parents reported that up to just a few years ago, they could drive themselves to see their children out of state. However, few parents in the sample had done this recently and a few reflected that this change felt like a loss. I heard stories about “when we still had the camper” (Chuck) and others reflecting on times when travel was more frequent. Many children on the East Coast, in the South, or in the Southwest saw their parents less frequently with airfare prices listed as a serious limitation for more frequent travel. Personal health factors also shaped the ability for parents to travel as often as they would like.

Three parents thought they saw their children “kinda about right overall” (Mark) and that they “see them enough” (Marge). The remaining 14 parents in the sample said they would like to see their children more often than they do and none said they would like to see their children less often. Henry was thoughtful when he
said, “I wish I could see all of them more. I’d love to have even the local ones visit more…oh, I understand, certainly I do, and I can’t be selfish. After all, they all have their own lives. I’m here just to support them.” Many parents quickly followed up their statements of wanting to see children more with explanations of why more time together was not possible. For parents, the most common reason: “They’re so busy.”

Research in the close relationship field has long recognized the “mental mathematics” that people go through to make evaluations about their relationships (Kelley, Berscheid, Christensen, Harvey, Huston, Levinger, McClintock, Peplau, & Peterson; 1983). Internal calculations about self and others carry a set of errors and biases. It is difficult to know what people mean when they feel that they see their children “about right” or would like to see them more often than they do. Individuals will have different evaluations of what seems like enough time together and these mental calculations are likely to change overtime within people. For example, aging parents can experience increasing limitations that hamper their ability to stay active in visiting children on their own. Transitions such as changes in health status can produce shifts in evaluations of time together.

A Paradox: The Experience of Time

A striking paradox stands out from reconciling parents’ feelings about quality time and their desire for more frequent contact with children, with statements that children are too busy with their own lives. Parents made both
positive and negative statements related to the degree of busyness in their children’s lives. Ambivalent feelings characterized the statements heard.

*Parents' Perspectives on their Children's Busyness*

I heard negative statements related to the busyness of children, but I also heard pride filled voices about the success of children. Remember that parents discussed all their children in the interviews, but often it was only one child with whom they had strong feelings related to the pace of their lives. Most families had at least one child who was extremely busy and consequently seen less often by parents compared to their siblings. The physical distance (child’s residence) did not appear directly related to accounts of busyness, as it did for frequency of contact in general.

*Mixed feelings about busy children.* A few of the parents reported feeling extreme sadness about the busyness of their children, creating mixed feelings they did not share with the children. Helen, a mother of four, with one child residing in the town where she lived, shared her feelings:

> I don’t want to be a hindrance to their lives either. So, you know, I look back and I was very busy when I was raising them, and then, my daughters’ remark when I came back to (town) was, ‘well, I hope you find something to keep your life busy’. In other words, don’t be a hindrance to me, so (pause), I have tried not to be.

Helen also mentioned that she would occasionally drop in on them because her church is nearby their home, and her general sentiment was, “If they’re busy, they’re busy. If they’re not, they’re not.” Chuck, a father of six, communicated his thoughts about a recent visit to South Carolina to see his son for his yearly visit:
They’re busy. And (pause) I guess we could see them a little more frequently, but we don’t want to interrupt anything and bother them now. Because, like... when we went back there, we stayed at Tom’s place. But they still had to do their work and everything else. And we didn’t want to interrupt. So we were basically sitting there, I was reading my book and (my wife) was watching television. And they were in the other room, in their office, doing business.

R: Did that make you feel like it was an interruption?

R: No. It’s just basically the way I feel. It’s not particularly that bad, because we do go out once in a while. Chuck was able to point out that he felt somewhat uncomfortable and disappointed about the quality of his visit with his son, but he was quick to be positive, and focus on the little bit of time that was meaningful to him. For example, on that same trip, they went to a museum, a memorable experience of the trip. Interestingly, besides his two children living in town, Chuck rarely saw his other four children. Chuck shared, “we don’t do too much talking back and forth, or visiting a heck of a lot. Because they’re busy. And they’ve got their children, and they’ve gone, and we just don’t really associate that much.”

Judith, who was very positive overall in her interview about the success of her two sons and their balance of having families with fast-paced career lives, shared philosophical insights into what she saw as the pace of her children’s lives:

R: I suppose everyone my age, and even younger, looks out at the world and sees this tremendous, tremendous, hustle bustle. And where the heck is it going? And all of the sudden, it just seems nonsensical to you. When it wasn’t so many years ago, you were living in the middle of it yourself. You know, and doing it.
I: Do you see that with your children now? Because they are busy with their careers and daily life?

R: They are terribly busy...I think, I don’t know, but I think maybe it is hitting both of them, a little bit, that it is not exactly what they want. But then the big dilemma is, you have, John still has a family. You know, he just can’t say, I’m gonna quit and go fishing.

Judith understands her boys. She can feel their struggles balancing their own families and active careers. She can still remember her own hustle and bustle of daily life, raising children and building a career. However, it was a slight concern for her, even amongst an incredibly positive interview about the happiness in her own life and the joy of seeing her sons successful, she wanted to be sure her sons were also happy. As Judith described how close she felt emotionally to her sons, she got tears in her eyes. Judith explained, “this sounds probably asinine, but I really think they are wonderful men, I really do. And if I never ever did anything else in my whole life, I just feel that it was a privilege (to have her sons)...I feel so deeply this.” In the middle of this 90-minute interview, I probed a little deeper, asking if there was anything that she felt she could not discuss with her sons. She responded, “I really sound like a silly mother. I can’t find any fault...I wouldn’t want to, I wouldn’t be looking for it. But if I just don’t see it, it’s just not there...I usually feel pride in their thinking processes.”

Jean also displayed extreme pride for her children, at the same time as feeling concern about the pace of her children’s lives. Jean shared her thoughts, “I think that I’m so proud of my children, they are good citizens...I’ve never had a problem with them....the only thing I might say is, I worry that they work too
hard...It's just very busy times.” I asked Jean if she thought the pace of life today was different from when she was growing up. She replied, “it’s a little different now. I think we just live such a fast life now. I think that we’ll find in another fifty years, or look back and think, ahh, we shouldn’t put some much pressure on the young people.”

The busyness of children and the hurried pace of their lives was an element of uncertainty for parents. Would their children regret being so busy? A few fathers explicitly shared this concern about their children, even in the contexts of displaying intense pride about their offspring’s successes. Some parents alluded to slight guilt they themselves had from living their own lives at a hurried pace.

Bill has three children and I asked him if anything in their childhood affects his current relationship with them now. He replied unexpectedly, and after a long pause, explained his situation as a forest service worker:

I wouldn't say that I spent a great deal of time with my kids. My wife can tell me, ‘do you remember when this happened or remember when that happened?’ and I say, all I was thinking about was my job. I can’t remember...It was a lot different when I was working then it is now. There was no sensitivity as far as family was concerned. Family was something that was personal and that you took care of yourself. And when you were on the job, you’re supposed to think about your job and working at it and maybe even when you’re not at the office. I had an office job and a field job too....and in the summertime, you didn’t take a vacation, because you are in the forest service, and there are fires to fight in the summertime.

Clearly, Bill and his wife made sacrifices in family time to support the expectations and demands of his career when the children were younger. John, who had spent his early and middle adulthood building a dentistry practice in the town where he raised his three sons, put it this way:
You’re just working like a fiend...when I retired I owned half a building, had five employees, big practice, knew everyone in town. And it just seems like a big scramble. One thing after another. I regret that I didn’t get to spend as much time as I wanted to with my kids...But to get somewhere, you have to work your tail off.

Bob, a father of four who had various jobs while raising his family and who had a wife working out of the home when the children were young, shared a similar observation about society. Bob stated his opinions about trying to find affordable housing for today’s families,

Here’s the problem...you just can’t get anything. It takes a husband and the wife if they want to get into a home of their own...because your payments are a $1,000 a month. Ours were $92...so the difference in the price of homes is just outrageous compared to what we had...and the wages haven’t kept up too.

What these parents were sharing with me was a sense and understanding of the real struggles they had experienced raising a family. They recognized the sacrifices people make to bring in consistent income to achieve goals like home ownership and entrepreneurial self-employment. Parents can identify with their children that these are the same challenges their children face today, yet this seems compounded by today’s fast paced society.

Parents displayed positive and negative emotions simultaneously about the busyness of their children, that often made them unavailable for more frequent, longer, or quality visits. Although ambivalence was not a word chosen by the participants of this study, their expressions could certainly be classified as such. They expressed mixed emotions about the busyness of their children.
Parents described reasons as to why their children were so busy. It is important to understand aspects of the children’s lives that are associated with statements made by parents that say their children are busy. The themes were not surprising, but were strongly stated and called for attention in analysis. Two reasons parents repeatedly shared as factors contributing to the busyness of children: (a) demanding jobs and educational pursuits, and (b) parenting and household responsibilities.

**Demanding jobs and educational pursuits.** Nearly all of the 75 relationships discussed during the interviews involved some description of the type of occupation or educational training children had gained across their lifespan. For the most part, parents felt pride in giving brief synopses of where their children attended college and many gave details about companies where their children worked. Three child’s occupations remained unknown, and six of the children were not currently working. Reasons parents gave as to why certain children were not working included disability, incarceration, medical leave, and unexpected company layoffs.

More interesting than what their children actually did to carve out livings in their respective communities was the parents’ perceptions of the children’s demanding jobs and educational pursuits. Parents expressed with mixed emotions, the busyness of their children and how career and educational goals limited the amount of time available to spend visiting, communicating by telephone or email, and helping parents with exchanges of aid or support.
The first response was to understand. Parents understood that children are busy because they have responsibilities to employers and school. Yet, these demands on the children's time indirectly influenced relationships with their parents, and the parents sensed this. Bob, a father who did not get to attend college himself, told an in-depth story of how he refinanced his home to send his children to school, and was delighted to speak about his daughter, Miriam's, success as a biochemist with her doctorate degree. However, Bob became serious and somewhat gloomy as he talked about this daughter's work-family overlap:

Now Miriam is our concern. Well, my concern. That she is just so busy. See you got to decide, and some of them do it, and she's doing it alright. But a career, and also being a mother. See, it's hard. It's difficult (emphasis). She just gets so tired and worn. But she wanted to be a scientist, and she's a good one. But...If you go that route, and you're not home, and being a full time mother. You got that extra hours to put in on each day.

Bob continued to share with me his ideas for how Miriam might find more time for her family; Bob thought her husband should work more hours so Miriam could stay at home. I was left wondering how Miriam might respond if she heard her father's suggestion. So I asked him.

I: Is that something that you can talk to her about?

R: Oh, no. (quick response). Ohhh, no. I don't even talk to my wife about it. I just, no, I wouldn't say a word. In time, we hope, that it will come about. Right now, it's not likely.

Some parents seemed to have a good handle on what their children's work and school worlds were like. Other parents seemed not as in tune to the specifics.
Regardless, parents noticed the pace of life their children were living. Andy explained why it is difficult to see his son more often than he would like:

The toughest one to see is our oldest son. Because... he is taking a class, it’s a four-year class pushed into two-years... he wants to be in computers. And so he has classes two nights a week and at least three nights a week he is in the lab. And his wife has a very good job... she is an administrator... so we really don’t get to see them.

A few parents talked about their children communicating with them from work. Marge’s son worked nights and she was thrilled that “during his shift, if he isn’t busy, he’ll call”. Others said that children called from cell phones while commuting to work, but they frowned on this communication because they worried about their safety on the road while talking on the phone.

A few children worked multiple jobs or variable shifts. Ingrid, a mother of four who has three daughters living in the state, commented about how she does not get to see her middle daughter enough because she is working two jobs. Ingrid said, “she’s just a half-time Pastor now and working for the Red Cross for half time. She comes down maybe once a month for a weekend, but it doesn’t seem like we see her enough.” This was in comparison to her two sisters who lived in town and frequently had their mother over for dinners during the week. Frances, whose son is a long-haul truck driver, understood that her son may not want to drive to see her when he came off the road for short spurts at variable times of the year. She adjusted and was happy to drive up and see them every six weeks or so to save them the travel to see her.
Jerry had two children out of the state working on advanced degrees. He seemed to understand the busyness of their lives, even though he was disappointed that he did not see them too often. Jerry made clear, "he’s working on an MBA, in 8 - 5’s, so they don’t have much time.” He told in more detail, the life of his daughter, with whom he seemed especially close from other descriptions in the interview. Jerry talked about her pace of life working on a Ph.D. in a neuroscience field:

She’s got her course work, she’s got her residency, got her internship, got her thesis in, got it defended, and corrected, and got out of town, so we are going to celebrate with that. We make it a point, to try to have those sorts of times. Because you know, you only go down this road once. So you want to see all the, if you will, scenery that’s along the way.

He was able to translate her busyness into a positive indication that children were reaching milestones, goals of their own that the family acknowledged and took time to celebrate. I heard parents’ express success and pride in career and educational accomplishments of children in the same vein as the stories about not enough time for family. They reflected a bittersweet reality. Jean, with two busy children in the trade-exporting business, sums up the general sentiment I heard from most parents. Jean stated, “I’ve been very fortunate. I’m just very proud of both of them…The only thing I might say is, I worry that they work too hard. Because that sometimes, life seems to slip by.”

*Parenting and household responsibilities. Another strong theme emerged from interviewing parents about the lives their children: the presence of grandchildren. Forty-nine of the 75 children were parents. Nearly all interviewees
had positive things to share about their grandchildren. Parents recognized their children were busy raising their own families and running their own households.

When Judith was trying to explain how often she gets to see her two sons and grandsons, she became defensive for them,

We usually call on weekends, cause that’s when they’re home, and when they have a minute or two to breathe. And it’s the same with (his brother). They live such a busy life! (Emphasis) You know, you don’t want to intrude, not that they make us feel that we intrude. But, good heavens, we have eyes, we can see how raising the boys, running a store, doing everything that they do and they are involved in the community as much as they can be. But, we see them.

Bill thought that visits with his daughter lacked time to connect one-on-one because of the grandchildren, who were young. He looked annoyed when he told me,

Our daughter, I can’t spend much time with her, because she’s busy with her kids all the time...So she’s very busy when we go down to visit her and there isn’t much time to talk. Even in the evening, because the kids stay up so late. That it’s not a matter of them going to bed, and sitting around talking. I’m ready to go to bed when the kids are going to bed. Sometimes I get into bed before they do. (Irritated voice)

It seems reasonable that age of the grandchildren would influence the frequency of visits and quality time spent together. Mark had a daughter who lives on the East coast, and she is expecting her third child in a few months. He understood that flying was expensive and difficult for her and her husband’s young family. Mark was sad that he did not see them more often, because out of his many in-laws, he actually liked his daughter’s husband and thought her children were some of the best behaved of his grandchildren.
Finally, it is necessary to mention all the other household related tasks I heard that seemed to occupy some of the children’s downtime from work, school, and community involvement. Parents mentioned children fixing up their homes, keeping farm animals and house pets, and other typical but timely activities involved in keeping up a home. All these activities in some way limited already slim time slots allocated for spending time and communicating with, visiting, or helping extend family members, most notably, parents.

**Busyness and Exchanges of Help**

When parents talked about the types of help they exchange between themselves and their children, only some parents with local children received physical help on maintaining or fixing the parent’s homes. In fact, parents preferred their time with children not be spent on doing things around the house. They would rather have visiting time with children versus tangible assistance.

I explored the data for contrasts and comparisons related to the types of help parents received from children by their current marital status, but any inferences are confounded with gender. All fathers were either married or remarried. Fathers did seem to more readily provide financial supports to kin (children and grandchildren) than mothers, yet this may be either a byproduct of their marital status or economic level. Financial assistance did not clearly link to gender. Mothers and fathers discussed household help as an area of potential or occasional assistance from children, but factors such as busyness of the children and distance from children limited the likelihood or frequency of this exchange.
For example, John’s point of view sums up what many parents felt about receiving help from children:

They could both do it (his sons). But right now, and my wife too, we’re still able-bodied and we can do yard work. And I take care of almost all the maintenance on the yard and house. Now I don’t know how much longer I’ll do it. (He knocks three times on the table) But they are both so far away, it would be tough for them to come down and do that. I’d have to hire it out to local landscape people. I think they would do it. But, you know, you don’t get on an airplane, mow the lawn and go back. That’s diminishing returns.

It is important to note that this sample of community-dwelling independent older adults all felt that their independence was extremely important to them and this value permeated the interviews. Parents, for the most part, did not want to ask their children for help unless there were serious concerns or reasons for help.

Henry, a somewhat well-to-do fellow who was married, looked me straight in the eyes and raised his voice:

Well, let me put it this way. We get help from the boys, and their wives, the local ones, if we have a real need. Once again, my attitude is, I don’t want to impose on them. They have their own lives. They have their own things to do. And I don’t want to ask them to do things for us that would interfere with things they want to or have to do. So I would rather pay a man to blow the leaves out my yard...

Emma, reflected these same strong convictions, although she was not well off financially and has been a widow for the last 25 years. Her response was:

If I was really desperate, Pete would come over and do something. You know if I have a problem with plumbing or something. He would come and try to help. But I really don’t ask any of the kids, because like I said, they’re so busy themselves. Like I had a friend, and honest to God, she was just so unreasonable. Her son lived (three hours away). And after her husband died, she thought that he should come over on the weekends and mow her lawn. All the way over just to mow her lawn!...she said, ‘he’s the most ungrateful thing, if he doesn’t shape up, I’m taking him out of my
will.’ And I said, for crying out loud, Liz, he’s got his own home. So ya. For some people they really expect a lot. I wouldn’t. I would just like to have more time. That’s the one thing that I would love. That’s the important thing to me.

Henry and Emma represent the sample well in terms of their strong beliefs related to maintaining their independence as long as possible. All 17 parents said feeling independent was important to them and all gave examples of what they do to stay healthy and living on their own. In discussions on exchanges of help and the parent’s feelings of autonomy, I recognized an important element in the parent-child relationships. Parents felt that if they really needed their children, they would be there, whether the children were busy or not.

*Busy up to a point.* Children were only busy up to a critical point. In the everyday, children were described as keeping up with the hustle bustle of their demanding jobs, educational pursuits, parenting responsibilities, and household chores. Yet, when their parents experienced a serious health problem, such as needing surgery or hospitalization, children were there physically and emotionally.

Jean, a widow, told her story about having a serious heart surgery performed last year:

If there has ever been a doubt, I certainly found out, they were right there for me when I had my artery surgery, because both of them live a busy life. And yet they arranged it between the two, my daughter and son, that they would both, well they both came down every day (two hour drive)...when I got home from the hospital one would be here all day and all night, and the next day, the other one would come. So I knew that I was very well, you know, they cared.

Many parents in the sample did have serious health problems—diabetes, emphysema, hip replacement, or back surgeries—that required care and concern.
There were stories of children restructuring busy lives to tend to their parents for short periods. In all cases, parents were very appreciative of their help, but anxious to have their children go back to their own lives, prompting parents to hire or set up other mechanisms of support for their health problems. Marie’s words resonate what many parents felt about asking children for help. Marie said, “I try not to ask my kids... if I can’t do it, I hire it. And as long as I can, I’ll do that.” Parents, in many ways, fought off opportunities to be dependent. Some parents fortunate not to have experiences with serious health problems yet reported a similar comfort in either knowing that their children would be there if they needed them, or at least they saw no reason why they would not show concern. These parents, with untested requests for more of their children’s time, secretly held the hope that their children would be willing to visit or help if needed. The secret hope that children would be there if needed was apparent in John’s account. He and his wife have not yet needed hospitalization or suffered any serious illness. So, he had not formally requested more help from his children but revealed, ‘I think that they’d do it willingly. I hope I don’t have to. But, if we do, we will. And I think they’d be willing.” When I asked Emma if she would ask her kids for help if she had a serious health problem, she was quick to say, “I don’t know. I don’t know what would happen. I honestly don’t.” Vanessa has told me, and of course she’s the one living by herself... ‘well mother, you never have to worry, you won’t have to go to a rest home.’ But that isn’t always, doesn’t always happen that way. ”
Mark was hesitant to pinpoint a child that he thought he might ask for help if needed, he said, “I think they would come forth.” Parents who did not need help recovering from surgery or managing a health problem had apparently thought about whether they would feel comfortable asking their children if the need arose. Yet parents in this predicament were still uncertain how new needs or concerns would affect their relationships with their children. This ambivalence could be characterized as similar to what the literature depicts for the middle-generation contemplating caregiving anticipation.

**Health concerns about the younger generation.** Interestingly, parents were as likely to mention concerns about the health of their adult children, as they were to comment on their own health predicaments. I did not intentionally probe for information about the health conditions of their children in the interviews, but some parents had concerns about their children’s health that influenced how they felt about them, how much support they gave to them, and how often they saw them. Health concerns parents held about the younger generation included recovering from a heart attack, maintaining cancer remission, living with schizophrenia, escaping from drug addictions, and overcoming complications from obesity and dietary problems.

Marge was emotional at the end of her interview when she mentioned, “all my children, all three of them...are potential alcoholics.” One of her sons had already been through a treatment program. Another son lives out-of-state and out-of-sight, Marge last saw him four years ago, and it was with uncertainty she said:
Jessie could very well be an alcoholic. But he's never, at that point where he isn't working, or, where he's bumming around. And because of his weight, he can drink a lot more than most people. And absorb it. So, it is a constant concern. I'm always concerned about his health. Because of my [employment] background, and also because of his weight.

This statement reveals Marge's parental affection and concern fraught with worry.

This story about the potentiality of alcoholism in the family was an unspoken concern that highlighted her poor communication with her son.

Parents had other comments about their children beyond health concerns, reflecting an uncertainty with how to act and what to say under certain situations involving their children. Parents noticed other spheres in their relationships with children that had sensitive boundaries requiring negotiation and monitoring. In the next section, I explored statements related to parents claiming, "I don't say anything."

There were areas within parent-child relationships that the parents felt they had to refrain from discussing or thought were not open to sharing their candid opinions with children. Sometimes boundaries were clear and not crossed by either generation, other times parents accidentally transversed these areas and learned that they were not welcomed. Moreover, a few parents simply kept thoughts private because they believed that their children were past the ages of influence and allowed to stumble and fall as full-grown adults.
THEME: Respecting and Negotiating Boundaries around Spheres of Influence

Parents seemed to balance advice giving with respect and negotiation of boundaries around spheres of influence. Parents recognized a conflict between what they think and would like to say to their children with the potential effects advice giving could produce on their relationships. Age and developmental stage of the child came up when parents tried to express their conflicted thoughts from navigating boundaries of influence.

It is worth noting again that the adult children discussed in the interviews ranged from 23 to 60 years in age. Most parents did not feel that it was appropriate for them to interject their personal opinions into every facet of their children’s lives. Children were adults and needed to work out issues for themselves. As Frances put it, “you’ll always be proud as a parent, because you come from blood, and they are your child, but we have made this switch to very independent adult with lives of their own.” Helen mentioned this letting go in a bittersweet voice,

Families, sometimes they can be great, but sometimes, like that old saying, When the kids are little they break your arms, and when they grow up they break your heart. Yep, in a lot of ways they do (serious)...you can’t run their lives for ‘em, you just, you gotta step back.

Helen thought stepping back began when her children got married. Other parents alluded to a developmental change in their relationships occurring once children left the house. Marge commented that in her relationships with her children, she stopped getting involved when they had adult romantic relationship crises. She mentioned her reason for pushing away, “I don’t try to get into solving problems. Because only they can.” Other parents warned of the dangers in crossing
relationship boundaries. For example, Jerry felt that you can overstep in giving advice, he said,

That’s trying to micro manage her life. Which, you know, you can’t do. You bring up your concerns, and all that, but...I’m sure you can read between the lines, there are a lot of things that I’d like to see them do differently. But if my parents would have approached me at age 30 or 40, 45, and said you really got to do this. That would have burnt bridges there. And I can only expect that it would here also...Because after all, you know, twenty years is the most you should be raising children. Spending 45 years on the same child, that’s getting a little bit out of line.

Most of the comments made by parents in terms of respecting or negotiating boundaries around spheres of influence were in reference to giving advice to the younger generations. Chuck got into some trouble with his son when they were on a road trip together and he was giving unsolicited advice on how his son should operate the motor home they were traveling in:

We were getting along fine, then I don’t know, I think I told him something, and he says, ‘there you go again, being bossy again. I don’t want this.’ So, I apologized, because I was, I was beginning to tell him what to do and how to do it. And it was his motor home and all this, and I should have kept my mouth shut. But every once in a while, I let my bulldog mouth overload my Pekinese butt.

Henry thought the desire to give advice should take a backseat to the more important ideals of camaraderie, support, and love in his relationships with his children. He explained how he and his wife had rationalized the situation of having different beliefs about the world from their children:

We don’t intrude upon their thinking, their activities...Eleanor and I...very carefully avoid any comment...because the friendship relationship that exists between us is more important than having our own way. Our imposing, and having them accept our ideas. We would just rather back away to maintain our good relationships, than strain them. Because none of
these things are that important, in the overall of life. So we don’t get into arguments or into disputes over our differences in ideas and feelings.

Parents encountered conflicted thoughts about when to step in and when to stay out of their children’s lives around four important life spheres. These four spheres or areas are: financial matters, core beliefs of politics and religion, romantic partnerships, and parenting styles.

**Boundaries around Financial Matters**

Parents often disagreed with how children handled their personal finances. Jerry made contemptuous remarks about his son’s lack of savings, his daughter and her husbands’ bargaining tactics to purchase a used vehicle, and his other son’s methods for purchasing real estate. Jerry seemed to put efforts toward not saying anything critical to his children, but in reality, sometimes he did comment on financial matters. Jerry explained his frustrations about his son’s real estate decision, “I indicated that I was kind of disappointed in this. In marriage, emotion and love should be very, very important. When you buy a house, it should be the last emotion that you show.” Jerry and his son went back and forth for several months, dragging both wives and Jerry’s daughter into the argument for mediation. Jerry said, “that’s when we dropped it. I mean, that’s about as far as I felt carrying the criticism. Because there will be another house, in time.” As far as giving advice, Ingrid kept things to herself and she said, “if they want to buy something, I don’t tell them don’t buy that!” Even if that was what Ingrid was thinking inside, she would never cross that line and tell her children what to do.
Bill was unique among the parents in this study, in that he felt "most of our relationship is about money. I think about money a lot." Certainly, other parents felt there were deeper qualities in their relationships than just financial connections. Bill continued to elaborate,

R: Money is important to me. So, I talk about stocks and I talk to them about how they are getting along financially. Although, they usually now don't ever tell me they need help. Cause they feel that maybe they'll get some help they don't want.

I: Do you mean like advice that they don't want?

R: That's right. For the most part. Particularly our oldest son. He doesn't want any advice, he gives me advice. (cynical voice)

In terms of providing financial help, parents in general gave much more to their children than they received. Andy provided $25,000 to a son in serious trouble, and he shared his view on this, "you are never out of the financial end...we feel blessed with the money that we have, and if we feel that it is needed, we help." Chuck on the other hand, who was probably the least well-off financially of all the fathers, was irritated when his incarcerated daughter would call him and his wife for money.

Perhaps a difference in attitude among parents about their willingness to share financial resources and advice about such concerns differed by socio-economic status of the parents, or by evaluations of what the real needs of the children actually were. Another example is Emma, who had little money to spare, but shared what she could when her daughter became divorced and consequently a single parent. I did not specifically ask parents about money transfers to their...
children or other kin, however, financial assistance came up in the majority of the interviews when parents were asked about help given to or received from children.

Boundaries around Core Beliefs of Politics and Religion

A few parents brought up religious or political belief differences between themselves and their children as a point of contention. Mostly parents felt that it was reasonable that their children had different points of view on politics, and no such differences altered the quality of relationships in any significant way. Jerry was direct when he said, "all of them have been away from the home long enough... they have re-developed their values and emotions, certainly, since they left home." Helen mentioned, "they know I'm a Democrat, and I don't know if they're Republican or what they are." I asked her if they avoid talking politics. Helen replied laughing, "we do to some extent... we don't pursue it to where we get in a fight." This was the view that most parents possessed on differing political ideals.

Religion came up in a couple of interviews. Church attendance was a big deal for Andy. Early in the interview he asserted, "my wife and I are very active in the church. And strong Christians, we don't see that in our sons." The theme came up again when I asked if he disagreed with his sons on anything and he mentioned, "I told Brian, you know, you need to get your family, your three children into church." Finally, at the end of the interview, when asked about his mixed emotions, things he felt ambivalent about in his relationships with his boys, he admitted:
I wish they would get involved in the church or something. I'm concerned about that, but I'm not going to, I don't harp about it. I just tell them, for example, I just said, I'm not going to be working on Sunday, I think I need to be in church on Sundays. And you might think about it too. And that's it. So, I guess that would be the only thing, I don't know.

Most parents recognized that difference in political ideologies and religious beliefs were not amenable. Just because they respected their children's views and were aware of these differences, some parents still had conflicting thoughts and feelings about the actions and core beliefs of their children.

Boundaries around Romantic Partnerships

Romantic partnerships of the children created a gray area of advice giving; parents were not always clear in knowing where the boundaries around romantic partnerships were staked. For example, parents seemed unclear about what their level of involvement should be around divorces that their children were experiencing. Two parents, Bill and Emma, shared conflicted thoughts they had about asking their children about their divorces. Bill decided not to mention the divorce that happened three years ago and says he does not really know how his son feels about it. Bill said, “I'm sure if I asked my son, he'd give me some smart answer and let me know that he doesn't want to talk about it.” Emma had mixed feelings when her daughter waited two weeks to tell that her husband had asked for a divorce from her. Emma said she was sad that she was the last to know in the family and she just assumed that her daughter was trying to protect her because she knew that Emma had been close to this son-in-law. Other romantic relationships mentioned as areas of forbidden conversation or intervention between
parents and their children referenced the distant past. For example, Marie had a
daughter in an abusive relationship that caused great concern for the family, but
that was nearly 17 years ago.

About half of the parents identified at least one in-law relationship that was
slightly problematic. For some parents, the quality of the in-law relationships
affected their relationships with their children. For others, the parents ignored what
they could and tried to maintain civil relations with persons (in-laws) that were
poor fits with their own temperaments and interaction styles. Ingrid saw her son
who lives in Alaska about once a year, and she blamed her daughter-in-law as a
cause for the limited frequency of contact. Ingrid confided, “his wife has never
been very, real friendly with our family. So that kinda keeps him from ...well, last
time I saw him it was fine, but she was just a little stand-offish of something.” This
situation saddened and frustrated Ingrid, but there was very little she could do
about it, so she tried to make the best of whatever visiting time she had with her
son even if the wife was there.

Helen’s daughters-in-law drove her crazy. She mentioned that she makes
fun of the way they behave and dress with her daughter and they both get a good
laugh. Helen also felt that her daughters-in-law were unfair with their efforts to see
her. One daughter-in-law would frequently come into town (from two hours away)
to see her own mother and not call her to stop by. This infuriated Helen. Jerry was
also annoyed with his two daughters-in-law, claiming that he often was walking on
eggshells around them to not upset them because their feelings were hurt easily.
Jerry showed a certain sarcastic side during his interview, which, if apparent at family functions might be seen as an obstacle to an easy conversation with him.

Boundaries around Parenting Styles

Half of the parents reported having concerns or clashing ideas about the parenting styles of their children. However, parents were keenly aware that this was not an area open to negotiation. Parents most often said nothing even when they did feel that their children were making mistakes in their parenting. I sensed that many of these attitudes kept at bay slipped out to the children at various times. The interviews lacked recurrent accounts of situations when parents overstepped boundaries around parenting styles. In retrospect, I wish I had spent more time during the interviews discussing parents' hidden thoughts around giving advice to children on parenting practices and suspect that is an area fraught with ambivalent feelings for older parents/grandparents.

Mick's response to the question if he felt ambivalent about anything with his children or in his relationships with them, created this touching statement:

I don't agree with the way they raise their kids. But, they're doing it and you're not. So you just think about it once in a while and let it pass. you have to not put, some of your thoughts into their situation, because you are not there. You have to be flexible when dealing with the kids. You cannot always, as the natives would say, walk in their shoes. And if they want to talk, you need to listen. And if they ask for advice, then you can state what you think. But you shouldn't be trying to tell them what they should be doing.... You don't always agree with their relationship with their husband or wife, and things. But they are the ones that have to deal with it. And when you try, grandparents or adults, try to get involved in that. Then it gets really mixed up. The main thing is, just have your door open so that when they do come, they can feel comfortable and stay.
When I asked Bob about things that got on his nerves with his children, he admitted, "We have had the experience that they haven't had. And sometimes we feel that they are not doing right sometimes with their children. But we don't say anything, that's their thing. If they ask for advice, we tell them. You just can't, as much as you'd like to, you just can't."

Other parents shared specifics about parenting style clashes that created upsetting feelings. Marie stated, "Katie's husband kinda dictates how they raise their kids. when it wasn't always the way that statistics show that it should go. I mean he would let them watch anything on t.v. and play with the vcr. When I think they should be more social.. .1 don't say anything. It goes much further when you don't."

Bill described what he does when he encounters annoying experiences during visits at his daughter's house when she is trying to control her hyperactive kids. Bill said, "we don't say anything. I just pick up a book or a paper and just keep my mouth shut. And I think that my wife does the same thing. To a certain extent."

Emma gets annoyed that her daughter will not let her 11-year old granddaughter watch the news or know what is happening in the world. Emma has to monitor what she says to her granddaughter and this irritates her because she believes hiding things will hurt her granddaughter in the future. Emma does not talk to her daughter about this issue, but she did mention that she makes snippy comments to her other children about this behavior in hopes that her daughter would hear.

It is false to assume that all parents "successfully" avoided conflict or disagreement with children by not saying anything when they strongly disagreed with their children. Parents seemed more willing to generalize or provide the
overall rationalization of how they handle having conflicted feelings ("I don’t say anything"). Missing from the interview were explicit stories and experiences around violated boundaries. I think it is reasonable to consider the areas mentioned by the parents as possible candidates for areas where boundary violations have openly occurred between parents and children. Perhaps a reframing of interview questions could have better solicited such experiences of violated boundaries.

**Summary of Boundaries**

Overall, parents felt strongly that giving advice to children about their parenting practices was not acceptable. Parents were cognizant that they were not in a primary parental role for their grandchildren. As was true for issues around romantic relationships and in-laws, parents sometimes avoided sharing their real opinions about their children’s choices. Parents also respected the boundaries around their children’s personal freedom to explore and adhere to any political or religious agenda they desired. Helping children with financial decisions or when and when not to provide financial assistance had a less clear boundary. Parents and children negotiated this boundary more openly than in the other categories, but nevertheless boundaries were still around the financial sphere of influence and parents respected their children when they caught on that it was time for them to retreat.

**Within-Family Analyses**

As mentioned, within-family analyses were possible from the nature of the data collected—each parent discussed all relationships with their children.
Nevertheless, analyzing the data for themes around within-family differences or similarities did not yield complete information. Parents were hesitant to compare their children directly. Parents had no problems discussing positive and negative features of their relationships with each child individually; however, parents did not make the direct statements needed to conclude how they felt their relationships were different with individual children. I remain reluctant to infer within-family differences and similarities for this reason. If I had asked about only one child, however, I would have received a very limited account of the parents' family life. A few parents did hint toward having favorite children among the family, but underlying the favoritism was more often a match in interests or temperament between the parents and children, rather than any attributions to the other siblings. Also, a characteristic of one sibling could influence family visits. For instance, Emma's son had an overbearing presence during family visits and was always bossing his sisters around stating his opinions, cutting others off in mid-sentence, and giving strong suggestions about family decisions. A strong characteristic of one sibling may filter through the general family interaction, but again, it is impossible to infer results to this level and there was only one example in the interviews.

The major strength of asking parents about all their children in this study was not the within-family analyses; instead, it was the variety of relationships uncovered within the same family. Children were different from each other. Helen felt that she had four different kids, "with four different personalities". Three
parents—Ingrid, Mark and Bob—specifically mentioned the age gaps of their children impacting the children’s relationships with each other and the parenting practices that they tried with each set. Ingrid explains, “It seems like the kids are in different groups”. Ingrid’s first two children born in 1943 and 1946 were alike, whereas her last two daughters born in 1952 and 1955 were more alike in style preferences and values. Mark’s children were born between 1956 and 1980, and he pointed to his own parenting style as a father evolving during that time. Cohort effects did shape the experiences of family life for the participants and while this information was intriguing, it was not the focus of this study and I sometimes avoided probing further on this topic.

Management Strategies

The fourth research question for this project examined the management strategies that older parents used when they were feeling mixed emotions in their relationships with their children or felt ambivalent about how to act under certain situations. It was difficult to tease out any pattern that strongly associated a particular relationship issue with a specific behavioral or cognitive management strategy employed by the older parent. Instead, management strategies were somewhat general, meaning that older parents tended to act in a particular way all the time and parents did not have specific strategies to solve distinct issues.

A few parents discussed how they think about their own aging and their relationships with grown children more often than they say something. Parents were more likely to think about issues concerning themselves than they were to
When Ingrid was asked if she had any mixed feelings about her children, she responded, “oh, I wish sometimes that they would do something different, I try to say it’s their life”. I followed up with a comment, “so you might be feeling it, but it’s not something you express.” Ingrid nodded her head and agreed, “that’s right”. Another mother, Emma, mentioned that she may have times when she is feeling a little blue and wants to talk to her daughter that she feels close with. Emma described a cycle that happens when she regrets opening up too much to her daughter:

I can say anything to Vanessa.. and then I get to thinking, cause I’ve talked to her, when I felt bad about something, and let her really know it. Then I think, next time I talk to her. I’m not going to give her all my problems. That’s not fair! To be puttin’ ‘em all on her. So, the next time I’ll try to be cheery, because I don’t want her to think I’m sitting around here all the time blue. .. and I can tell when she has felt sorry for me, because she’ll call that much more often.

Emma’s cycle of saying, thinking, and feeling highlights the process of reflection. Sometimes parents made their mixed feelings known and sometimes they kept these thoughts private.

The idea of not saying anything came up in the theme about experiencing ambivalence while respecting and negotiating boundaries around spheres of influence. Many parents felt the best tactic in a variety of situations was just to keep quiet. For some, the quietness meant letting go and accepting differences and for others the silence was a holding in and refraining from judgment. The attitude of sensing when to back off also appeared in the theme of respecting and negotiating boundaries. Helen was recalling an episode with a local
daughter where something happened and they had a disagreement. Helen explained, “I'm the type of person, if I get really pushed, I back off, and I don't mess around”. Jerry also justified his own sense of when to back off from a situation that was bothering him with his son. For Jerry, this backing off was an attitude that helped him handle his upset and disappointed feelings. Jerry reacts, “why bring it up? You can't re-live, you only go down this road once. You can't go back and walk that trail again. He has learned a lesson”. Likewise, Jean avoids trouble when she can; she says with her two children, “we are not much to talk about negative things. We try to, if there is no value in bringing it up, we don’t. We focus on what's positive, and not the negative.”

A few parents felt like a strategy they used to get along with their children was to make conscious efforts not to pressure them. Very early in the interview, Helen blurted out, “you see, I don't pressure the kids, I really don't. I don't even pressure them at Christmas, they all have in-laws and out-laws, so I like to get together with them sometime over the holidays, but I don't pressure”. Similarly, Henry stated his attitude was to just stay patient with his kids. Henry waits, much like other parents in this sample, for his children to call him or to suggest that they would like to visit.

Although violated boundaries were not a focus of the study in the interviews, I did hear a willingness to apologize if the parent hurt feelings, overstepped boundaries, or got into arguments with children. However, parents only apologized if they felt a wrongdoing. There was no indication that parents
apologized just to smooth things over in their relationships. An interesting comment made by two fathers was the idea that you should not expect your children to be a source of comfort. Bill liked to keep things “formal” in his relationships with his three children. Mark mentioned that he did not seek his children out for comfort. Eliminating an expectation of reciprocal emotional support is an example of a management strategy that may be useful dealing with uncertainty or mixed feelings or it may be a manifestation of strong independence.

In discussing that she felt mixed emotions, Marge had the belief that she could handle it when she was uncertain about things. Marge made clear, “I don’t resort to panic, I’ll sit down and say okay, what is happening here? I know my body pretty well too”. Parents also showed a knowledge about themselves and the ability to recognize whey they were upset or angry.

Andy talked about his youngest son, Jason, who has had a hearing impairment since birth. Andy mentioned that he and his wife had the most difficult time raising this boy and he required different punishment as a child, they had more disagreements when he was an adolescent, and that today he needs more financial and tangible help than his brothers. Andy admitted that his youngest son’s lack of rationality frustrated him more than it frustrated his wife. Andy made little comments throughout the entire interview such as: “With the two older boys you can talk about anything. With Jason, it’s a much shallower situation” and “Jason, with his handicap, it’s just different”. Andy also shared sentiments such as, “the thing that I worry the most about turns out to be with my youngest son”.
When Andy answered directly about what he had mixed feelings over, if anything, he responded tenderly:

Probably with Jason. Yes. With his physical and mental handicaps. I probably have mixed emotions about how I should handle everything...that's probably the biggest issue. I don't really have mixed emotions about the other two. They're pretty much straightforward.

Andy had learned to recognize his frustrations, anger, and disappointment with his youngest son's disabilities. Although, these negative feelings were still present in some of his one-liner comments, Andy also showed love and concern over his son. Andy managed his mixed emotions about his son Jason by knowing and recognizing how he was thinking, acting and feeling.

Finally, parents stayed optimistic and in general spoke positively about their relationships with their children. Positive statements nested in statements about irritations and disappointments seemed to support the idea of generational or downward developmental stake. Parents presented multi-faceted images of their children—exposing negative and positive features about their individual characters or circumstances during the interviews. Yet, most of the parents upheld relatively positive images of their aging and tried to stay optimistic about what they could still actively do in their daily lives.

It seemed reasonable that a management strategy of having mixed feelings or conflicted thoughts about children might be for the parent to activate his or her social support network. I looked over the interviews for such instances. Availability of social support splintered along marital status. Every married man and woman in the sample mentioned their spouse, some at different portions of the
Spouses were co-decision makers, potential caregivers, and helpers with projects done around the home. Parents mentioned hoping to rely on spouses rather than children for primary emotional support and tangible assistance. In contrast, the four widowed and two divorced mothers in the sample spontaneously mentioned friendships and colleagues from their volunteer work as sources of social support. Many parents, regardless of marital status, found solace in church fellowship. These differing social networks were supports that helped buffer issues or problems that came up for older parents. Activated social support was another management strategy.

A few parents decided on setting up formal or professional services to manage mixed feelings or conflicting thoughts about an issue or a need. For example, Frances, a widow, set up living wills and trusts without her children's knowledge. Jean had her entire funeral service planned for and paid; she did not want to leave that for her daughter and son to handle. Marie and Ingrid had professional cleaners come to their houses so they did not have to ask her local children for housework help. Henry paid a neighborhood service to cut his lawn and blow leaves, because he would never ask his local children to spend their time doing such things. These examples of older parents' willingness to pay for help before they asked for any from children was a management strategy they used to protect their independence and resolve practical needs.
Chapter 5
DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

Interviewing older parents with two or more children for this project established support for the emotional experience of intergenerational ambivalence. Two major themes arose over what healthy, independently living parents feel ambivalent about in their relationships with their midlife children. The first theme focused on how parents simultaneously felt sadness and pride about the busyness of their children’s lives. In some respects, parents sensed themselves left out of their children’s everyday life, yet they accepted these feelings with a gratified knowledge that their children were functioning adults in society.

Descriptions of quality time with children offered by the parents placed their children’s busyness into a bittersweet context. Parents often desired more connection with their children—if not frequent, at least sincere—in the form of visits and conversations. Parents delighted in just knowing what children were doing in their everyday life. Some parents, even those with children residing in the same town, had limited knowledge of their children’s lives. A paradox emerged around the experience of time. Although parents identified with their children’s busyness because they too remember the fast-paced nature of adulthood, parents pined for more time together. With children so busy, they may be missing the last remaining years of their parents’ healthy and independent lifestyle. Consequently, this time left—before major illnesses or serious injuries occupy the focus of visits and conversations—may represent their last chances at having quality time with their parents.
Parents were pleased and comforted with the knowledge that their children were successful in careers and in raising their own families, but expressed melancholy feelings that they were not more of an integral part of their children’s lives. On a more abstract level, it seems that the parents’ views were reflecting the speeding up or hurried pace of today’s American culture (Daly, 1996). In spite of this, many parents did feel that their children were busy up to a point because if they really needed to call on them or had a serious injury or illness, they felt attended to and supported. Interestingly, health concerns discussed were not necessarily those of the older generation. Parents had serious concerns for their middle-aged children’s health as well.

The second major theme of intergenerational ambivalence that surfaced from the interviews was the issue of respecting and negotiating boundaries around spheres of influence. Parents oscillated between positive and negative feelings and thoughts about the appropriateness of offering advice to children. Parents shared emotional experiences of stepping back, allowing their children to live their own lives even if they disapproved of certain aspects of it. Parents also shared situations when they felt they did interfere and overstepped their right to comment on their children’s life decisions. Unfortunately, examples of violated boundaries were limited because this theme arose unexpectedly out of the interviews and interview questions did not capture these negotiations in detail. The theme related to respecting and negotiating boundaries centered around four issues: financial matters, core beliefs of politics and religion, romantic partnerships, and parenting.
styles. The psychological ambivalence in these situations was the experience of conflicting thoughts about when to assert opposing opinions and when to accept differing beliefs for the sake of the relationship. Most parents agreed with conviction that their relationships with their children overall were more important than trivial differences that came up in conversations or interactions. The concept of generational stake (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Hagestad, 1982) may be used to understand the tendency for older parents to lessen the importance of areas where parents thought they differed from children.

As referred to earlier, older adults experience complex emotions more commonly than younger adults do, a term call "poignancy" (Catstensen, et al., 2000). Consistent with the idea of emotional poignancy, aging is often associated with emotional maturation because experiences over time may broaden or deepen one's ability to regulate the complexity of human emotion (Labouvie-Vief & DeVoe, 1991). Furthermore, Carstensen, et al., (2000) suggest that older adults may savor emotions in later years because of perceived time left in life. Perhaps older adults are not only capable of feeling intense, complex emotions, but they may be better suited to handle them and allow them to exist without desire for resolution. The idea of savoring complex, mixed emotions is interesting. Complex or mixed emotions are simply a part of life and this project supports the notion that older parents may be well suited in managing ambivalence experiences with their offspring.
The ambivalence themes explored in this project answered two of the research questions—Is intergenerational ambivalence experienced by older parents? And what are the mixed emotions of intergenerational ambivalence expressed by older parents? The third research question aimed at understanding within-family or across-children differences was more elusive to answer.

In retrospect, my interview protocol was not well designed to capture disparate differences between children. This was in combination with parents’ hesitance to compare children directly against each other. Even with this limitation, some trends were revealed such as the parent’s acknowledgment of a favorite child and the disturbance of one child’s strong personal characteristics influencing the dynamics of family interaction. Although within-family comparisons did not clearly emerge, at least by asking parents about all their children a greater diversity of experience appeared in the interviews. Thus, asking parents about each child was certainly a strength of the study.

The final research question that drove the analyses examined management strategies that older parents used to handle experiencing ambivalence in their relationships. Management strategies did not covary with particular situations. In contrast, it appeared parents managed feeling simultaneous, contradictory emotions in a generalized way.

Parents in this study did a lot of thinking and reflecting on their personal feelings toward children and life situations. Parents tried not to be a hindrance to the lives of their children. Sensing and respecting boundaries and learning when to
step back was a strategy many parents used to reconcile their mixed thoughts. Some parents mentioned eliminating an expectation of emotional support from children. Additionally, parents activated social support and professional services, rather than treading on the unsettled or unknown terrain of help from children.

From previous research presented in the literature review earlier, I came into this project believing that the display of intergenerational ambivalence may be more subtle for the older generation (Fingerman, 1996; 2001; Pyke, 1999). What do I mean by a more subtle experience? The experience of ambivalence for older adults compared to the middle generation might be slightly restrained, taken for granted, articulated with a positive spin, and somewhat difficult to detect. This study found that older parents do experience intergenerational ambivalence as real and not necessarily subtly. To determine subtlety in emotional expression, responses from the older parents must be compared to something else. However, intensity of emotion compared to younger adults (midlife children) was not addressed in this study and remains a possible area of future research. Likewise, a limitation to this study is the absence of the middle generation’s perspective. The issues and events described by parents in this sample may have other facets to the story left out by parents. An example is frequency of contact, or the notion of midlife children being too busy to visit with their parents more often. I am unaware of many other factors that influence the frequency of contact between the generations that the older parents did not mention, and that their children would point out or explain differently.
One striking element of all the interviews and apparent in both themes is the issue of respect. Parents often held great respect for their children as adults. Parents were sensitive to issues of interfering; parent's did not want to be a hindrance on children's busy lives and tried not to (for the most part) overstep boundaries in their relationships. Perhaps an element not captured in these interviews that was a component of not wanting to intrude on children was the secret desire for children to respect them, as their aging parents. Parents waited for phone calls, requests for visits, and for opportunities to share advice and wisdom. To speculate, from this project I have come to believe that parents craved the respect that they tried to bestow to their offspring. For those interested in intergenerational relationships, we can only hypothesize how these current relationship qualities are remnants from past relationships of the parents in this sample with their own parents.

What the qualitative results from this project do demonstrate is the need to consider specific factors in future studies on intergenerational ambivalence focusing on the experience of the older generation: cohort effects and developmental stage. This study provides evidence that older parents do experience intergenerational ambivalence. Future studies can examine how the experience of ambivalence is different by generational and cohort membership within parent-child dyads.

A principal contribution this study gives to the emergence of intergenerational ambivalence as a concept of study in parent-child relations over
the lifecourse is the experience of older mothers and fathers. I found no evidence mothers and fathers experienced qualitatively different emotions. Mothers and fathers felt intense emotions, although they may have differed under which situations they displayed their emotions. The underlying experience of ambivalence was very similar for mothers and fathers. For example, in both themes describing a paradox in time experience (busyness of children) and in the respecting and negotiating spheres of influence, mothers and fathers shared their concerns equally. The results presented represent every parental voice in this study. Mothers and fathers did not differ in the types of expressed emotions nor in their intensity or willingness to share feelings. Respondents were surprisingly receptive to me in sharing intimate details about their relationships; some sharing thoughts and feelings they had not even discussed with their own children or spouses. Temperamental differences or personal characteristics were likely to inhibit or enhance the sharing of emotions more so than gender.

This sample partially represented the concept of "developmental schism" differences in the parent-child relationships (Fingerman, 1996; Fingerman, 2001). Developmental differences between parents and children could be inferred, but because I did not interview the children, I did not fully analyze the developmental schism dynamics that may have been underway in the relationships. Dyadic data is necessary to understand those relational dynamics. For example, parent’s discussions about grandchildren or great-grandchildren remained in context and not separated out for unique analysis. In context, it did appear as though parents
who had grandchildren did more easily identify with their children because they could make connections with them by sharing this developmental event. Likewise, parents identified with children who had struggles with health problems because parents had shared similar experiences of mental or physical loss. Additionally, parents had empathy for their midlife children’s work responsibilities and achievements (e.g. parents recalled their own busy work histories). Developmental differences were also depicted in unshared experiences—childlessness and certain educational pursuits. Parents felt some disconnect from children that were very different from them. However, this trend did not warrant a complete analysis.

There was support that parents in this sample felt generational stake in their relationships with their children because parents highlighted positive features of their children. However, given that parents also discussed negative features about their children or about their relationships with them, I did not feel that the interviews were superficial from generational stake issues. In practice, the generational stake issue is not much different from the premise of social desirability concerns in research. While I prepared in advance for social desirability effects to materialize in the interview process, I was spared of any major setbacks during the interviews and overall found the parents extremely sharing and willing to admit to good and bad events or circumstances.

The interviews conducted for this project were with healthy older adults not co-residing with extended family, not in formal caregiving situations, and living independently in the community. There was an important finding from this
study that connects specifically back to the current literature on intergenerational ambivalence with the middle-aged generation on caregiving anticipation (Lang, in press; Lorenz-Meyer, 2001). Older parents in this study reported experiencing mixed emotions over what they would do in a potentially precarious situation of needing more care to manage health problems or illness; this was remarkably similar to the middle generation’s views in previous studies (Lang, in press; Lorenz-Meyer, 2001). Parents consistently reported not wanting to ask for help from their children. Parents were well aware of the structural constraints (i.e. time, money, location) on their children. Parents’ own strong feelings of independence overrode any desire to share conflicting thoughts with their children about potentially needing daily care someday. It is possible that the experience of mixed emotions prohibits needed conversations between parents and children about the realities of future concerns. Perhaps if parents and children were made to feel and recognize that their mixed feelings were not only normal, but shared, difficult conversations would occur appropriately, reciprocally, and well-timed.

Adjustments and negotiation, even if tinged with ambivalence, would pursue.

*Future Research*

Future research on intergenerational ambivalence experienced from the older parents’ perspective can develop from the findings of this study. Parents’ mixed emotions over the potential caregiving needs they may have could match up with the feelings of the younger generation in taking on such requests. This situation studied from a dyadic design could further our understanding of how
relationship ambivalence is experienced. This study examined ambivalence on an individual level (Curran, 2002; Lettke, 2001). Dyadic reports on the relationship would produce interesting results over the areas uncovered in this study. For example, the experience of time and the perceived pace of life could be the focal point of inquiry in a dyadic study. Cohort and generational effects may influence the perception of time and sense of busyness in life in ways that are not captured from individual reports.

Other research centered on the boundaries of respect and negotiation (i.e. financial concerns; parenting styles) may reveal discrepant views between the generations. Perhaps older adults experience different mixed emotions than their children even if attributed to the same events or conversations around relationship issues. Focused research addressing areas such as divorce, in-law relationships, and parenting practices of the midlife children may be particularly fruitful for the study of intergenerational ambivalence.

It would be useful to understand how ambivalent emotions differ between parent and child in their intergenerational relations. Likewise, future studies can address how intergenerational ambivalence is experienced differently among siblings within a family or varies for parents with many children.

Management strategies for the experience of mixed emotions on an individual level may be categorized in future studies. A larger, more representative sample of older parents may reveal additional patterns of managing ambivalence situations. Longitudinal studies could also address the topic of life transitions,
ambivalent experiences with children, and management strategies. For example, a
parent's move from the community to an assisted-living facility may represent a
transition that creates different ambivalent experiences for the parent versus their
children.

Conclusions

From results presented in this study, mixed emotions seem to be a natural
and normative experience in late life. Older parents experienced ambivalence on a
personal or psychological level. Conflicting inner thoughts flowed from
interactions and conversations with their children. Everyday activities between the
generations resulted in intense emotional experiences. Additionally, older parents
may not feel an overwhelming need to resolve mixed or conflicting feelings. Other
research may find that older individuals, compared to younger counterparts, are
well suited to manage ambivalence in their close relationships.

Although this study's purpose was to examine the psychological
experience of intergenerational ambivalence, it is easy to gleam how structural
factors are responsible for the development of mixed feelings and contradictory
expectations and desires between people whom share close ties. Both levels of the
intergenerational ambivalence framework—the psychological and the
sociological—are essential in future studies to fully grasp the phenomena
(Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998).

Structural factors in the experiences of intergenerational ambivalence from
this study's two main themes can further be explored. The experience of time—
finite and unpredictable—constrains the availability of contact between
generations. How might the experience of time together be different for children
and parents coresiding compared against children who live a great distance from
parents and on average see their parents once a year? How does retirement status
of the parent or child influence the experience of ambivalence? Should we expect
differences in degree of busyness? How might geographic location effect the
experience of intergenerational ambivalence? Norms of reciprocity and respect
may constrain the boundaries of negotiation over realms of life between
generations. Regional differences in the United States (i.e. South, Midwest,
Northwest) may contribute to differing norms among families. Ethnic differences
would reveal different patterns; how might cultures that value a strong expectation
of interdependency or filial care among parents and children have different
perspectives on frequency of contact and boundaries of respect? These are just a
few examples of how structural elements of social life can be incorporated into
studies on psychological ambivalence.

It is true that this study clearly demonstrated validity in the concept of
intergenerational ambivalence as a theoretical construct and its utility in
understanding parent-child relations in late life. A fundamental question, however,
remains: Why study intergenerational ambivalence at all? Alternatively, one may
wonder why intergenerational ambivalence is important to understand in the field
of family studies and gerontology.
I think understanding the mechanisms of ambivalence in close relationships calls into question the very essence of human life. What makes life meaningful? Our experiences and our relationships and of course the emotional experiences from our closest relationships. We should attempt to embrace complexity in our research on families, as well as embrace the complexity of our emotional lives. Having mixed emotions and uncertainty in our relationships is normal and natural.
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Appendix A

Interview Guide

(Association)

1. When was the last time you saw one of your children?
   
   Who was it? When was it?

2. How often do you usually see at least one of your children?

3. How often do you usually talk to your children on the phone?

4. Would you like to see your children more or less often than you do?
   
   If more: what prevents you from seeing your children more often?
   
   If less: what makes you feel that you see them too often?
   
   If ‘right amount’: what makes you feel that you see your children just about the right amount?

5. Quality time feels good and meaningful. Thinking about visits with your children, what would quality time with your children feel like to you?

6. How do you think your children would view quality time spent with you?

7. When you talk over the phone, (or write over email if appropriate) what types of things do you discuss with each other?
   
   Do you talk about things that are important and meaningful to you?
   
   Do you think your children talk with you about things that are important and meaningful to them?
   
   Are there things that you are comfortable talking about with one child, but not the other(s)?

______________________________
I would like to spend a few minutes talking about when your children were younger. Relationships change over time and one of things that I’m curious about is how things from earlier in life, influence how things are today. Were there events that caused you and one of your children to become really close or to separate and have some distance for a while? Over time, has there been any child that has had special needs or things happen in their life that you felt you needed to step in and help with or give advice on?

8. How emotionally close do you feel to your children today?

Do you feel different kinds of closeness with your different children? Is that different from when they were younger?

9. Compared to your friends that also have children about the same ages as yours, would you say you feel closer to your children than people you know? Probe: example of peers. How are your relationships better/worse?

10. Would you say that you and your children have similar opinions about how the world works and what is important in life? Probes: Which child is most like you? Which is the most different from you? Why or why not? Feelings about that?

(The Emotional Experiences)

Now, I’d like for you to think back and image yourself visiting with your children-try to get bring some memories of time you’ve recently spent together and think about what your did and how you felt.
11. When you spend time with your children—visiting or talking—how would you describe what you feel emotionally most of the time with your different children? When you visit or talk on the phone with your children, do you feel cared for and appreciated? Do you feel relaxed, like you can be yourself? Do visits or conversations with your son/daughter make you feel resentful, hurt, or criticized?

12. Do you and your son/daughter disagree or argue or have a difference in opinion about certain topics or in certain areas of conversation?

13. How about getting on each other's nerves, during a visit or in conversation? Does that happen?

14. Is there a certain child that you like to spend more time with? Probe: Is there a favorite child? What do you do together? Do you think your other children notice that you spend more time with that son/daughter?

(Intergenerational Exchanges)

I would like to know about the types of care and support that you provide to and receive from your sons/daughters. This might include things like babysitting, house or animal sitting, cooking, laundry, cleaning, repairs or maintenance jobs, transportation, loaning money, running errands, or gardening and lawn care.

15. Do you help any of your children with the types of activities and favors like the ones I just mentioned?
16. Do you receive any help with those same types of activities and favors from your children? Probe: for which child? Which types of support and how often?

17. Do you feel that you and your son/daughter exchange help about evenly?

18. Are there any types of activities that you wish your children would not help you with, but they insist on helping you with? How do you usually handle the situation, receiving help but not really caring for it?

19. Are there any types of support that you would like your children to do for you, but they have not offered, refused, or never seem to get around to actually doing it? Which activities? Have you tried to ask for help from your sons/daughters?

20. What about switching that around. Are there things that your son/daughter asks for help with, but you would rather not do or that you are doing right now that you wish you could stop? Probe for feelings, especially resentment, pleasure, or obligation.

(Feelings of Autonomy and Dependency)

21. Do you feel you can manage your life independently now?

22. Would you say that feeling independent is important for you?
23. If you really needed help, or had a serious health problem, would you ask for help from your children? Who would you ask, probe about the children that do not come up.

24. Are there things that you hide from your sons/daughters so that they will not have certain thoughts about you, your decisions, or how you choose to live?

25. Do you depend on your children for help with things that you wish that you could do, but are unable to? Which child? Examples: taxes, finances, cooking, things you did in past, but not now.

26. Do you ever feel unsure about how to act under certain situations related to your aging, issues such as health needs, driving, or finances? How do you feel you manage your life compared to other people your age?

27. Could you share with me examples about a certain time or situation when you felt torn or had mixed feelings or thoughts about your relationship with any of your children? How did you deal with that situation?

28. How do you manage any mixed feelings about your relationship with your child(ren)?

(The Salience of Ambivalence) For this project, I'm really interested in understanding the mixed feelings or thoughts that parents have in their relationships with their children.
Appendix B

List of Memos Used for Data Analytic Process

1. Theme: Respecting and Negotiating Boundaries around Spheres of Influence
2. Theme: Time & Busyness
3. Theme: Management Strategies of Emotions and Feeling Uncertainty
4. Positive Perceptions of Child (generational stake?)
5. Health and Aging Comments
6. Contrasts: Father/Mother verses Daughter/Son (gender)
7. Contrasts: Geographic Distance (within and between families)
8. Contrasts: Life Phase of Father & Mother/ Life Phase of Daughter & Son