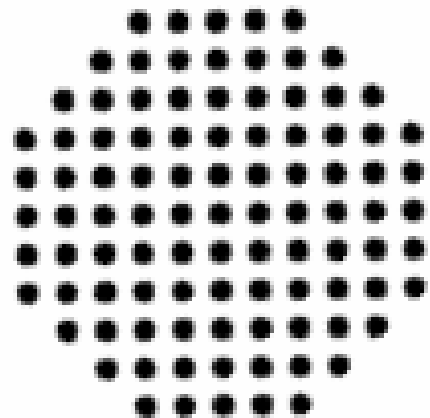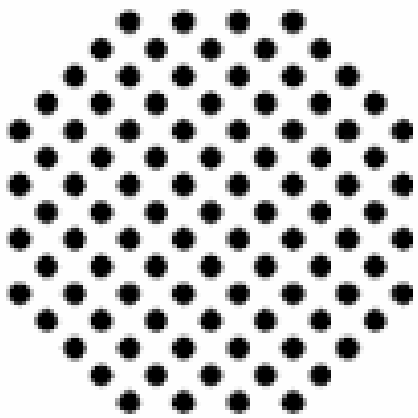# Solidarity and Ambivalence in Parent-Child Relationships

Ruben I. van Gaalen

Family isn't a word...it's a sentence
(The Royal Tenenbaums, 2001)

Solidarity and Ambivalence in Parent-Child Relationships

Ruben I. van Gaalen

Solidarity and Ambivalence in Parent-Child Relationships

Solidariteit en ambivalentie in
ouder-kind relaties

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit Utrecht
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus,
Prof. dr. W. H. Gispen,
ingevolge het besluit van het College van Promoties
in het openbaar te verdedigen op
vrijdag 5 oktober 2007 des middags te 14.30 uur

door
Ruben Ivo Antoine van Gaalen
geboren op 20 februari 1969, te Harderwijk

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CHAPTER 1

CHANGES IN FAMILIES –
CHALLENGES FOR RESEARCH

1. CHANGES IN FAMILIES – CHALLENGES FOR RESEARCH

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this book is to improve our understanding of parent-child ties by formulating and empirically investigating new challenges for intergenerational family relationship research. Families are constantly in flux. In this chapter we first consider changes in contemporary family structure which are brought about by social-demographic developments. Next we consider changes in the nature of intergenerational family relationships. These changes are generally viewed as arising from socio-cultural developments. Subsequently, we formulate new challenges for intergenerational family relationship research. These challenges question both scientific and common sense views on past and contemporary family life, and open new horizons for family research. Although our focus is on Dutch families, the situation in the Netherlands can be considered exemplary for other countries in Western and Northern Europe (Garssen, De Beer, Cuyvers, & De Jong, 2001; Inglehart, 1997; Reher, 2004).

1.2 Changes in family structure

Family structure changed as is evident in (1) the emergence and (2) the decline of the nuclear family, (3) increasing family heterogeneity, and (4) an increasing significance of intergenerational bonds within the family structure.

The first change is what is often referred to as 'the rising significance of the nuclear family' since the Industrial Revolution, that is, the period from 1850 towards the twentieth century (Bengtson, 2001; Hareven, 1991; Kooy, 1985; Shorter, 1975). Within this period, a new stability came to families, mainly because medical care improved and became broadly available. This can be seen in Figure 1.1, which depicts the strongly decreasing percentages of infectious diseases'[1] or tuberculosis-related deaths since 1900. The figure also shows the decrease in infant mortality in the same period. Life expectancy increased considerably.

Figure 1.2 depicts the life expectancy at birth, at age 15, 45, and 75 years old from 1860 onwards. The main progress was made among children and young adults. Recent prognoses of Statistics Netherlands (see Figure 1.2) show a continuing increase in longevity. As Figure 1.3 shows, the total fertility rate (TFR) strongly decreased, from 4.5 in 1900 to 2.2 children per women aged between 15 and 50 in 1935.

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[1] Except for the short increase around 1918, related to the Spanish Flue.

Figure 1.1: Death causes (% of all deaths) and infant mortality in the Netherlands:
Period 1900-2000
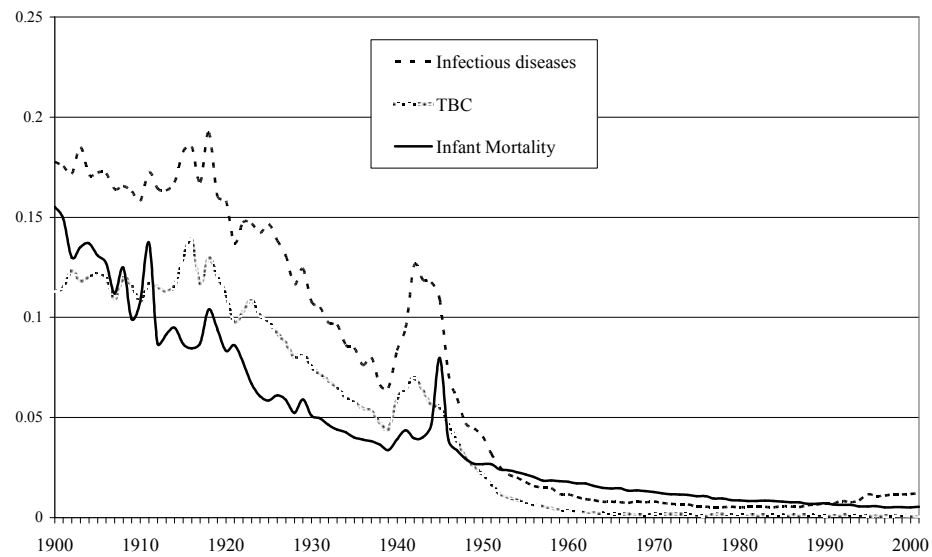
Source: Statline (Statistics Netherlands, 2007a)

Figure 1.2: Life expectancy women and men at age 0, 15, 45, and 75 in the
Netherlands: Period 1860-2005, and prognosis 2006-2050
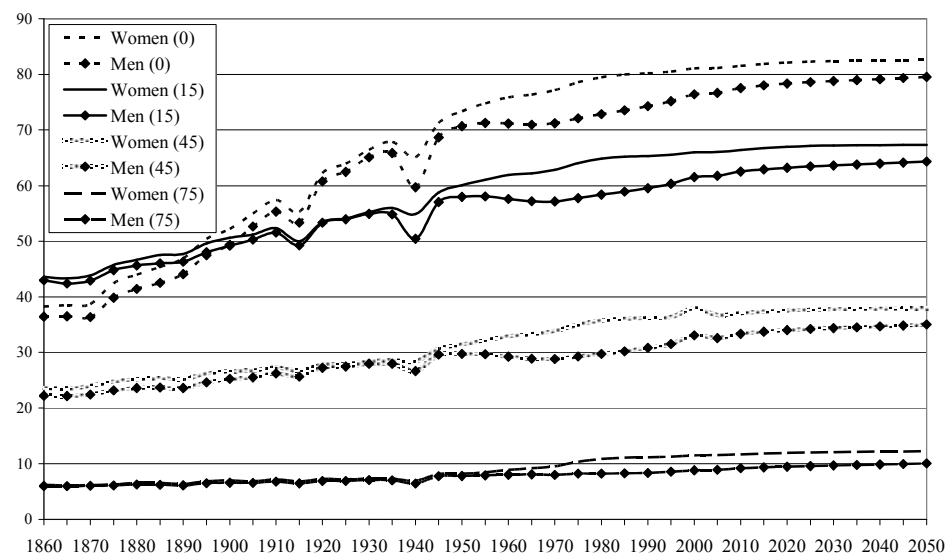
Source: Statline (Statistics Netherlands, 2007a)

Figure 1.3: Marriages, divorces, total fertility rate (women age 15-50)
and extra-martial live births in the Netherlands:
Period 1900-2005
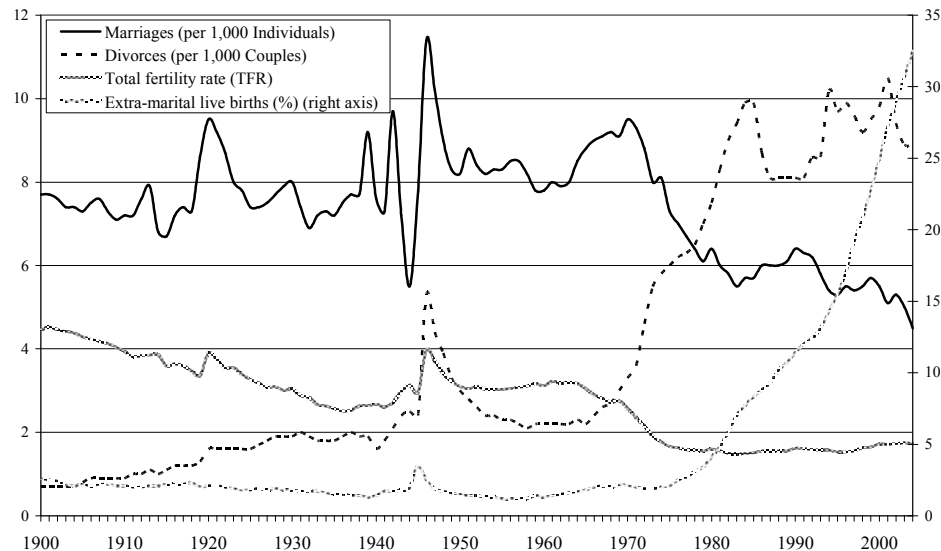
Source: Statline (Statistics Netherlands, 2007a)

Family life was strongly disrupted during the destructive years of the Second World War. After 1945, people sought comfort in the haven of the nuclear family, which is evident in high rates of demographic events such as marrying and becoming a parent. In Figure 1.3, one can see the highest numbers of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants ever, and the so-called 'baby boom' in the postwar years. The increase in life expectancy and fertility induced that family members started sharing more years of their lives together. In addition, the family transformed from an extended kin network to the single household, conjugal family, in which primary kin lived together in one household.

The second change is what has been referred to as 'the decline of the modern nuclear family' (Bengtson, 2001). Modernization not only entailed an increase in life expectancy, but was also evident in developments such as urbanization, secularism, and the emancipation of women (Ultee, Arts, & Flap, 1992).

The strong increase of the labor force participation of women, which directly relates to the expansion of education in the past century, raised the earning capacity of females (Blossfeld, 1995). This modified the interdependence in couples: Both men and women started focusing on individual rather than mutual goals and needs (Blossfeld & Drobnič, 2001).

Figure 1.4: Mean age women at first marriage and at first birth in the Netherlands:
Period 1900-2005
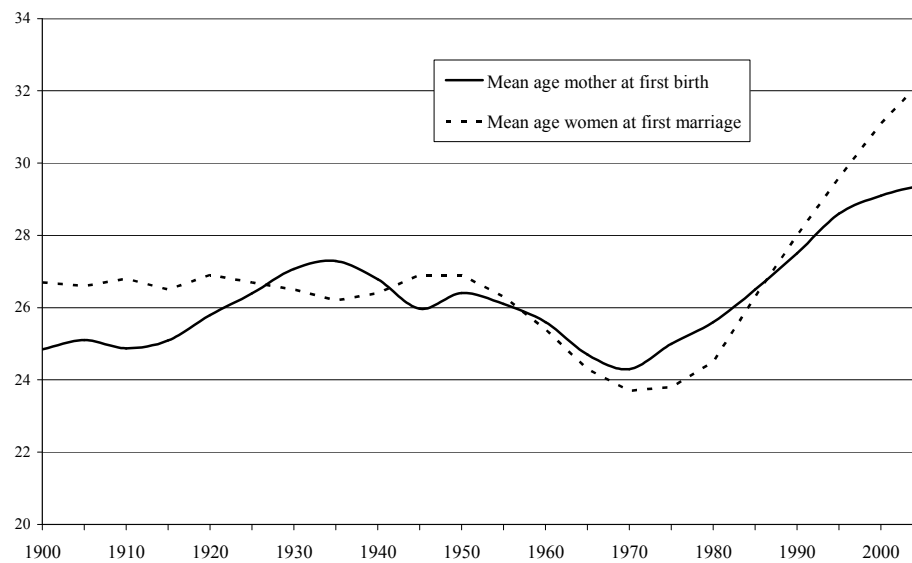
Source: HSN, NKPS, and Statline (Statistics Netherlands, 2007a)

Figure 1.5: Childlessness and education in the Netherlands:
% Women born between 1922-1964
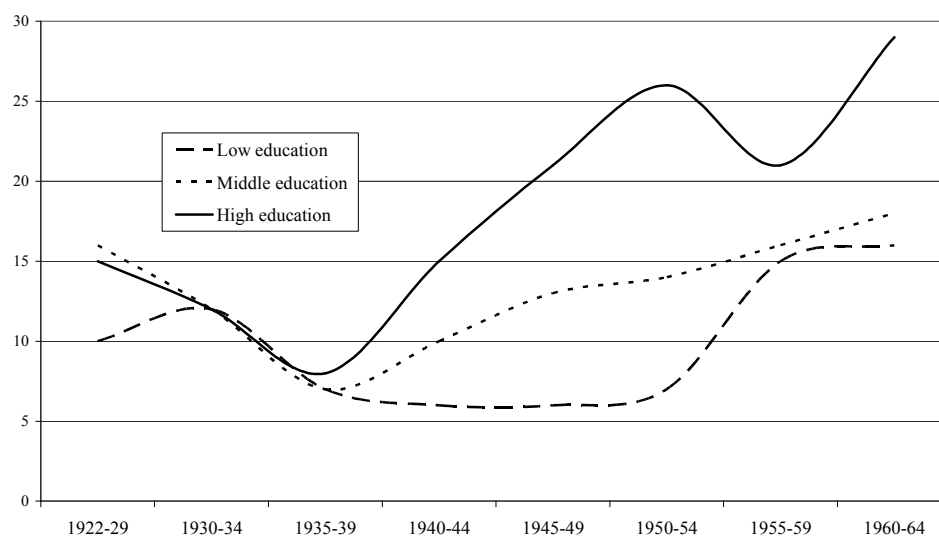
Source: NKPS and Statline (Statistics Netherlands, 2007a)

Figure 1.6: Married, unmarried, and lone parents (mothers) in the Netherlands:
Age 40-45 between 1995-2006
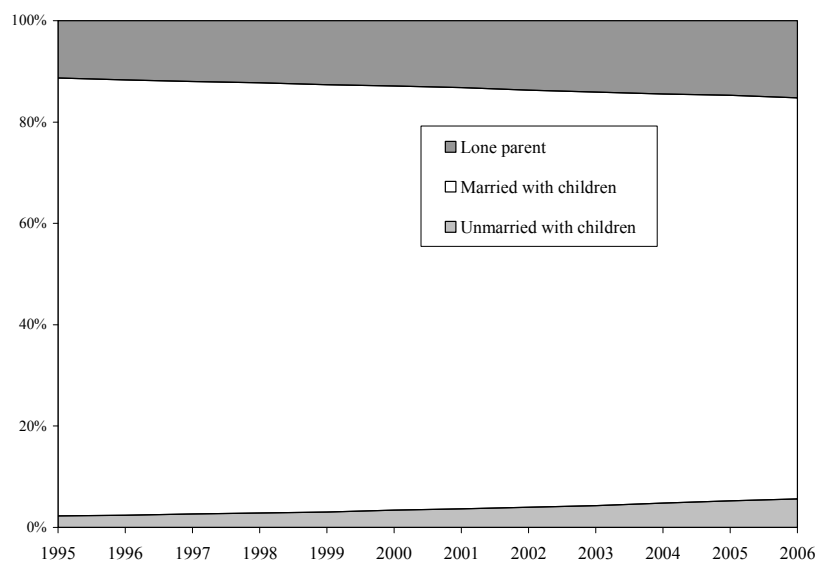
Source: Statline (Statistics Netherlands, 2007a)

We have seen new concomitant changes in family patterns since the middle of the 1960s. The decline of the nuclear family has become evident in the postponement of marriage and parenthood, the decline in the birth rate, the rise in consensual unions, the increase in the numbers of children born outside of marriage, and the rise in divorce rates (Allan, Hawker, & Crow, 2001; Kuijsten, 1999; Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). Figure 1.3 shows the strong increase of divorces since the end of the 1960s. The postponement of marriage and parenthood are depicted in Figure 1.4. As a result, the age difference between parents and children has increased, as contemporary cohorts are relatively old when they make the transition to parenthood. As Figure 1.5 shows, an increasing proportion of women – especially among the highly educated – remains childless. The intergenerational family structure has narrowed down in size, as lower birth rates decreased the number of siblings. Instability marched into family life, when divorce started to divide parents and children over separate households.

The third change in family structure is 'an increasing heterogeneity of the family' (Bengtson, 2001). Despite the decline of the traditional nuclear family, the majority of the Dutch children still grow up in intact families, headed by both biological parents (Dykstra & Komter, 2006). Three out of four married couples stay together and divorce rates are not expected to go up further in the future (Garssen et al., 2001). One often cited reason is that men and women increasingly live in 'trial marriages', that is, in consensual unions, and subsequent marriages prove to be relatively stable (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000). However, unmarried parents run a higher risk of breaking up than their married counterparts (Liefbroer & Dourleijn, 2006).

Figure 1.7: Parents, siblings, and children, alive at age 45 in the Netherlands:
Birth cohorts 1923-1958
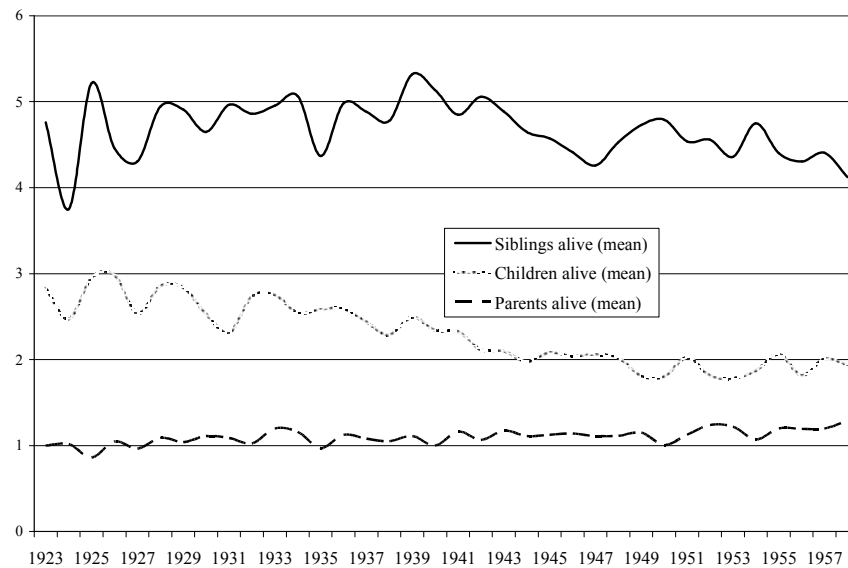
Source: NKPS

Parental separation continues to disrupt the contemporary lives of parents and children, which is the main indicator for the increasing heterogeneity of the family (Bengtson, 2001). At the household level we see decreases in the percentages of married couples with children, and increases in the percentages of unmarried and lone parents (s. Figure 1.6).

Another feature of family heterogeneity is that 'the' family structure does not exist, as contemporary families can have a variety of forms. An example is the occurrence of so-called binuclear families, where divorce is followed by remarriage, causing the children to have a heterogenic familial environment (two households; presence of step family), but allowing them to have continued contact with both biological parents (Ahrons, 1979, 1998). The families formed after re-partnering often become even more complex, as these new unions have much higher probabilities of breaking up again (Coleman et al., 2000). An illustration of a complex 'new' family is the one where children are raised by a gay or lesbian couple, of which one is the biological father or mother, often divorced, whereas the partner is the stepparent (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

The fourth change, which is a central theme in this book, is 'the increasing importance of intergenerational bonds' in the 21st century. Family structure increasingly verticalized from a pyramid into a 'beanpole' form, tall and thin, with few people in each generation (Bengtson, 2001; Seltzer et al., 2005). Because of the drop in fertility rates, the number of within-generation ties has decreased relative to the number of across generation ties. In addition, the number of years of shared lives between generations is greater than at any time in history given the increase in longevity (Farkas & Hogan, 1995; Hagestad, 1981; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). In the beanpole (in Dutch*: bonenstaak*) structure relates to an increasing significance if

parent-child bonds, because parents can give more attention (dedication, time, money) to the upbringing of their children and the relative importance of every each adult child increases, especially in case ageing parents need daily or ad-hoc care.

The narrowing of the generational family structure is depicted in Figure 1.7. The figure shows, for people born between 1923 and 1958 the number of living parents, siblings, and children at age 45. Across cohorts, we see decreasing numbers of siblings and children, and increasing numbers of living parents. The beanpole family structure has implications for the content of single intergenerational ties (e.g. contact and support) within families. We will argue that the two developments we described above – relatively few parent-child relationships and relatively much life time to spend together – call for a greater consideration of siblings in the investigation of parent-child relationships.

1.3   Challenges for research I

1.3.1   Family structure in a long-term perspective

We have alluded (as many others have done before us) to the implications of demographic changes such as the increase in longevity, the postponement of marriage and childbearing, and the rise in divorce, for family ties. Social scientific work on family change has largely focused on developments occurring in the second half of the 20th century. Given this starting point, the nuclear family in its most traditional form, as it was dominant shortly after the Second World War, became the standard against which social scientists (e.g., Parsons, 1955), as well as journalists and conservative politicians measured and assessed the developments of families and their relationships. The two-parent family with children came to have the status of 'normalness'. Single-parent families, one-person households, childless couples, step-families or those unconventional in other ways were not subsumed under the umbrella of what families should be (Bengtson, Rosenthal, & Burton, 1996; Stacey, 1993).

To assess what is 'normal' and 'non-normal', it is useful to adopt a long-time perspective (Coontz, 2000). Until recently, there has been a paucity of data allowing a historical perspective on 20th century changes in families and living arrangements. For example, nationally representative accounts of the family arrangements in which children grew up before the emergence of the nuclear family are lacking. Research on the life course has largely been on transitions into adulthood and thereafter (Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000), overlooking experiences that occurred during childhood. Demographic data are restricted to individuals and marriages. For that reason, we have no information on demographic events as they occur in families. As a result, we have been unable to answer questions such as: How many parents have divorced children? How many children have divorced parents? Does divorce cluster in families? Have these patterns changed over time? Is the likelihood of being part of a single-parent family greater nowadays (given the rate of divorce) than it was in the past (given the early death of a parent)? Another limitation of demographic data is that they

provide no insight into social-structural differentiations. How are the trends patterned by social class? To answer the kinds of questions raised in this section, we need to use life history data. The recent availability of data sets such as the Historical Sample of the Netherlands (Mandemakers, 2001) and the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (Dykstra et al., 2005) make it possible to address questions such as the ones previously described.

The first research challenge taken up in this book is to put the emergence and decline of the nuclear family in the context of long-term developments in Western families. We do so by focusing on the family circumstances in childhood. More particularly, we consider changes between 1850 and 2000 in the living arrangements of children aged 0 to 15 in the Netherlands. Specific attention will be paid to social class differentiation. The first question we address is:

(1) How did the living arrangements of Dutch children aged 0 to 15 change between 1850 and 2000, and to what extent did the changes differ by social class?

1.3.2 The sibling's role in the beanpole

Earlier we noted that the changes in the generational structure of Western families call for a greater consideration of siblings in the investigation of parent-child relationships. The majority of children still grow up in households with at least one sibling. The 'narrowing' of generational family structures implies an increase in the relative importance of brothers and sisters, given that their numbers have decreased (Walker, Allen, & Connidis, 2004). The fewer children parents have, the more they can emotionally, socially, and financially invest in each individual child. And indeed, as time-use data of more than 16 Western countries reveal, parents devote more rearing-time per child than they did 40 years ago simply because they have fewer children (Gauthier, Smeeding, & Furstenberg, 2004). Empirical studies have also shown that parents and adult children meet and support each other more, if there are fewer siblings, that is, fewer parent-child ties (Fokkema, De Ruijter, & Maas, 2003; Lye, 1996; Silverstein, Parrott, & Bengtson, 1995; Tomassini et al., 2004). In sum, siblings are gaining importance in people's lives, simply because family sizes are declining.

However, in general, the importance of siblings remains at the margins of theory and empirical research (McHale & Crouter, 2004; Voorpostel, 2007). The sibling tie is the family relationship of the longest duration and one that undergoes considerable change over the course of biographical time (Matthews, 2002). The lives of young siblings are highly interdependent, but as siblings gain independence in adulthood their bond tends to weaken (Voorpostel, 2007). Like in any social group, interactions that parents have with one of their children are influenced by those they have with their other children (cf. Kelley et al., 2003; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Siblings mutually influence the relationship each has with their father or mother. Such interdependency is evident, for example, in qualitative studies on the ways in which siblings negotiate about the care for frail parents (Matthews, 2002; Matthews

& Rosner, 1988). Ironically, in almost all family studies on parent-child support and contact, virtually no attention is paid to characteristics of the sibling group, apart from the number of brothers and sisters. We argue that to understand behavior in parent-child relationships, especially in small families, one must stop treating parent-child dyads as independent units within families and start considering the interdependence between siblings and parent-child dyads (Riley, 1983). In sibling research, Voorpostel (2007) was the first to investigate the effect of support in parent-child relationships on support in sibling bonds within family triads. However, except for some work that focuses on gender composition (e.g., Campbell & Martin-Matthews, 2003; Coward & Dwyer, 1990; Spitze & Logan, 1991) and birth order effects (e.g., Bègue & Roché, 2005; Hertwig, Davis, & Sulloway, 2002; Houser, Berkman, & Bardsley, 1985), most studies on parent-child relationships do not go beyond the dyadic approach (Matthews, 2004).

The second research challenge taken up in this book is to explicitly consider interdependence among siblings. We examine the ways in which sibling network characteristics shape the contacts adult children have with their parents. The second question we address is:

(2) How do characteristics of the sibling network shape parent-child contact?

1.4 Changes in the nature of family relationships

The nature of intergenerational family ties changed as is evident in: (1) the decreasing need for mutual dependency structures in the shift from less obligatory to more chosen parent-child ties, (2) the growing emphasis on emotions and relationship quality, accompanied by (3) increasing complexities and a rising importance of negotiation within parent-child ties.

Previously, changes in family structure and their implications for the role of siblings in the family were considered. In what follows, changes in the nature of parent-child relationships will be addressed. Intergenerational family relationships have changed in the sense that there has been a 'decreasing need for mutual help' in adulthood (Coleman, 1990; 1993). The development of the welfare state decreased the practical need for family support, while a higher labor force participation of adult daughters and higher geographic mobility decreased the practical ability to take care of relatives (Weymann, 1998). Children are socialized to take care of their own lives – their occupational career, their partner, and their own children. Aging parents prefer to fend for themselves or to rely on formal services rather than receive support from their adult children (Daatland, 1990; Wielink, Huijsman, & McDonnell, 1997). Despite the decreasing need for exchange of instrumental support, the idea of isolated households and high percentages of detached relationships within families in contemporary societies has been addressed empirically (De Jong-Gierveld, 1998; Szydlik, 2000). Little empirical evidence has been found for the so called crowding out hypothesis, that formal support erodes informal support provided within the family (Daatland &

Lowenstein, 2005; Künemund & Rein, 1999; Motel-Klingebiel, Tesch-Roemer, & Von Kondratowitz, 2005).

Over the course of the last decades, family ties became less guided by collective norms, spelled out by, for example, the state or the church. Behavior in family ties came to depend more on individual standards (Bengtson, 2001; Hareven, 1991; Shorter, 1975). These changes are often described in terms of individualization, which means the decrease of traditional norms in favor of norms that espouse individually motivated decision-making (Beck, 1986; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1994). In general one can say that intergenerational support is less strongly economically or normatively motivated and more strongly guided by affective and individual concerns (Lye, 1996). This change has been described as the 'emotionalization' of family relationships, which can be found in the rising emphasis on feelings and relationship quality (Dykstra, 2003). Commitment and support-giving are increasingly affected by the quality of past interactions and the extent of liking in the present (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1990). For contemporary parents and adult children, the stimulus for mutual investments arises from the experience that economic independence, market activities, and friendships cannot be a full substitute for the emotional qualities of the parent-child relationship (Astone, Nathanson, Schoen, & Kim, 1999; Huinink, 2001). An interesting indication of the shift from economic towards emotional motives, together with the changing gender roles within couples, is that (non-) coresident fathers increasingly sustain their practical and emotional involvement in childrearing after the divorce (Coltrane, 1988; Sobolewski & King, 2005).

In sharp contrast to earlier times when mutual instrumental dependencies were clearly structured, we now see that intergenerational family interactions have become 'increasingly complex'. We mention three sources of complexity: Obligations, emotions and heterogeneity. First, parent-child interactions continue to be governed by feelings of obligation (Bengtson, 1993; Daatland & Herlofson, 2003; Finch, 1989). Though there is no economic need to exchange support, and though parents and children might not even like each other much, they keep in touch or help one another because they feel obligated to do so. More than ever, striving to achieve a balance between normative expectations and personal goals and circumstances is a source of complexity in family interactions (Connidis & McMullin, 2002). Second, emotionalization complicates the way parents and children interact, and what they share and exchange, in the sense that it increases the likelihood of having misunderstandings or experiencing a less rewarding relationship, without being able to pinpoint the direct reason for it (Umberson, 1992). Third, family heterogeneity can be a source of complexity. 'New' family forms such as those involving step-ties or those involving homosexual relationships call for individual and situational definitions of what 'family' is and of what can be expected from family members. For example, compared to traditional nuclear families, post-divorce families are characterized by higher levels of uncertainty, conflict, tensions, and ambiguity

due to the presence of both biological and step ties (Hanson, McLanahan, & Thomson, 1996; Stewart, 2005a; 2005b).

The described changes in the nature of intergenerational relationships even increase the need to give attention to both pushes and pulls in contemporary parent-child bonds. Until now, scholars have either focused on solidarity or conflict in family relationships, assuming that the former is positively, whereas the latter is negatively associated to relationship quality. In the following, we will argue that both solidarity and conflict must be studied simultaneously and that both can have positive and negative consequences for the relationship quality.

1.5   Challenges for Research II

1.5.1   Solidarity and conflict

Family sociologists have become increasingly aware of the challenges of incorporating the complexity of intergenerational relationships in theory and empirical research. One of these challenges is to investigate family conflict as well as family solidarity (Bengtson et al., 1996). In doing so, we question the mystification of family solidarity as the one and only goal of family members, and positive interactions as their only reality (Bengtson et al., 1996; Katz, Lowenstein, Phillips, & Daatland, 2004; Lüscher, 2002; Smelser, 1998; Sprey, 1969; Tyrell, 2001). It is surprising that the combination of both solidarity and conflict in intergenerational relationships has not been studied systematically until now, although it would provide a more realistic view of parent-child relationships. It is important to know what pulls contemporary Dutch parents and children together, and what pushes them apart. First, we still do not know much about the circumstances that either cement or undermine intergenerational ties. Second, it may also improve our knowledge about the conditions, under which ageing parents may lack practical support and possibly require formal services (Riley, 1983).

As we argued, hierarchical authoritative relationships, which were previously largely taken for granted, are increasingly being questioned within families. In our individualized times, parents and children negotiate, argue, discuss, and fight over the gives and gains of their roles and contributions. Although negativity in family relationships has always existed, explicitly questioning the logic and consequences of negative interactions is a new development within family research. Next to feelings of, love, obligations, and liking, there is greater room for expressions of dislike, discord and disagreement. According to Giddens (1991), as people 'do family' in such open way, the likelihood is high that they choose to remain only in 'pure', that is, emotionally satisfying relationships and leave those that are non-rewarding. In this line of reasoning, one can argue that contemporary parents and children would have to be like friends, to maintain regular contact and to exchange emotional and practical support. Indeed, a certain fraction of parents and adult children will choose not to be associated with one another. However, in most cases parents and children acknowledge

that their relationship has pushes and pulls, and ups and downs. In our view, classical sociological ideas are useful in understanding contemporary parent-child bonds as a search for balance between convergent or binding, and divergent or opposing elements (Coser, 1956; Simmel, 1904).

Our third challenge is to better understand the nature of contemporary parent-child ties by simultaneously investigating solidarity and conflict. The third question we address is:

(3) Can parent-child types of relationships be empirically distinguished on the basis of solidarity and conflict, and if so, what is their incidence?

1.5.2 Ambivalence and relationship quality

Classic work on social cohesion points to the integrative function of high quality intergenerational ties (Durkheim, 1896). It is often assumed that the frequency of personal contact and relationship quality are positively associated with one another (Homans, 1958). This assumption is questionable. In our view, *motives* for contact need to be considered. Interactions between parents and children are not only structured by variation in opportunities (available time and ties), or a result of free decision making (negotiations), but they are also structured by perceptions of obligations and dependence (Komter, 2001; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). The increase in voluntarism and emotionalism in family relationships does not imply that feelings of obligation no longer structure parent-child relationships (Finch, 1989; Ganong & Coleman, 2005). Feelings of obligation still play a role. It is conceivable that parent-child relationships have the highest quality when interactions are primarily governed by affection. If frequent parent-child contact arises from feelings of obligation, then relationship quality is likely to suffer, and all the more so, if obligations are at odds with time schedules and competing commitments. To the extent that interactions between parents and adult are enforced rather than freely chosen, the quality of the intergenerational bond is likely to be affected negatively (Smelser, 1998).

It is in this line of reasoning, that Connidis and McMullin (2002) argue there is a need to pay attention to intergenerational ambivalence, which they view as structurally patterned, competing demands that are experienced by parents and their adult children in their interactions with one another. We want to contribute to a more nuanced picture of the determinants of the quality of parent-child relationships and combine the centrality of relationship quality with the study of intergenerational solidarity and conflict. We consider the co-occurrence of solidarity and conflict as a behavioral manifestation of intergenerational ambivalence. It is a theoretical challenge to understand why supportive parent-child ties are cohesive and stable whereas others are ambiguous and stressful. We would like to know under what conditions high levels of support and contact are expressed, whereas a poor relationship quality is perceived. Our fourth research question is:

(4) What conditions increase the likelihood that high contact and high levels of support exchange between adult children and their parents are negatively rather than positively associated with relationship quality?

1.6 Data sources

Data from two sources are used: The Historical Sample of the Netherlands (HSN) and the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS). The two data sources are described below.

The aim of the HSN project was to build a national database with information on the complete life history of a 0.5 percent random sample (76,700 birth records) of men and women born in the Netherlands between 1812 (the year of introduction of the vital registration system) and 1922. In all Dutch provinces a random sample of births was drawn which was stratified by period of birth and level of urbanization of the municipality (Mandemakers, 2001). The selected individuals are followed in the consecutive population registers, and, in case of migration, in the population register of the new place of residence, to death or to the present-day if still alive. We only use a selection of data from the HSN-database. Our analyses are restricted to three of the eleven Dutch provinces – Zeeland, Utrecht and Friesland- and to children born between 1850 and 1922, giving a total of about 7,500 births roughly evenly distributed over the three areas. The restriction to cohorts born in the period 1850-1922 is motivated by the fact that information on the family structure during childhood can only be collected by using the population register, available from 1850 on. The three specific provinces were selected because they are where the collection of information has progressed most.

The aim of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) was to collect information on the strength and nature of Dutch family ties (Dykstra et al., 2000, , 2005). We make use of data from the main sample, which is a random sample of more than 8,000 individuals within private households (response rate was over 45%). All respondents were between 18 and 79 years old at the time of the interview (2002-2004), covering birth cohorts between 1923 and 1986. Residents of care institutions, penitentiaries, homes for the elderly and holiday homes were excluded from the sample frame (Dykstra et al., 2005). About 1 per cent of all Dutch men and 1.7 per cent of all Dutch women live in one of these institutions (Statistics Netherlands, 2007a). The general data collection procedure involved the following steps. First the interviewer mailed an introductory letter. A day or two after sending the letter, the interviewer contacted the addressee to make an appointment for an interview. The interview was to be conducted at home, but if he or she preferred to be interviewed elsewhere, this option was provided. In the face-to-face interview the main respondent – the 'anchor' – was questioned about his or her life course retrospectively and life situation today, and on the relationship with family members, the so-called 'alters'. The alters are (a) the current partner, (b) both living biological parents, (c) at the most two randomly selected biological children, (d) at the most two randomly selected siblings, (e) one randomly selected friend, and (f)

parent-in-law (max. 9 persons). A self-completion questionnaire was handed to the anchor at the end of the interview. The interviewer was responsible for collecting the completed questionnaire and returning it to the fieldwork agency. The interviewer filled in an evaluation form after the interview.

1.7   Outline of the book

The book is structured in the order in which the research challenges were formulated. We believe that much of the popular debates on family decline build more on ideas about facts than on facts (see for a discussion, e.g., Bengtson, 2001; Stacey, 1993). An empirical-driven historical view may put today's family structure in perspective of continuous change *and* stability. We first (Chapter 2) study the historical backbone of contemporary family life. We go back to the 19th century, reach beyond the emergence of the nuclear family, and depict how children grew up since then. Such long term perspective enables us show developments of family life from birth till the age of 15, between 1850 and 2000, mainly concentrating on the presence of biological parents or step parents.

Next, we will focus on the conditions, under which contact and support exchange, conflict and relationship quality vary in contemporary adult child-parent relationships.

With the thinning of the family stem siblings become more important, one would guess. In most studies on parent-child ties, siblings play a marginal role. However, the sibling network is part of the structural setting of family life. In addition, siblings influence each other and they influence their relationship with their mutual parent. In Chapter 3, we investigate the influence of siblings on contact in single parent-child relationships. We combine ideas taken from social exchange theory and social network approaches and formulate hypotheses on the role of sibling network characteristics and the position of adult children within the network.

Family ties are not all rosy, all the times. In chapter 4 we argue that both positive and negative interactions belong to family relationships. Especially in parent-child ties, binding and opposing elements simultaneously play an important role in parent-child relationships. We investigate different features of both solidarity and conflict in one analytical step and we want to know, under what conditions typical combinations of these features occur.

Chapter 5 expands on this and questions classical assumptions about social relations, assuming that the more contact the better. We define the high solidarity/high conflict as ambivalence and we want to know under what conditions ambivalence relates positively or negatively to relationship quality in high contact ties. We hypothesize that the presence of exit options is the key element in the crossroad between love and anger in families. Chapter 6 presents the conclusion, discussion, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

GROWING UP IN THE NETHERLANDS BETWEEN 1850 AND 2000

2. GROWING UP IN THE NETHERLANDS BETWEEN 1850 AND 2000 [2, 3]

2.1 Introduction

The demographic and social processes of the past 150 years radically changed the number of parents children grew up with. In this paper, we use two unique datasets to illustrate long-term changes in the living arrangements of children born between 1850 and 1985 in the Netherlands. We describe in detail changes in terms of whether fathers, mothers and stepparents lived with these children at birth and at age 15. We also examine whether siblings - and if so how many - lived with the child, and we discuss variations in the living arrangements of children according to social class and level of education. We observe a massive shift in the living arrangements of the 1850-79 cohort compared with the 1880-99 cohort of children and only a slight return to nineteenth-century conditions in the most recent birth cohort.

2.2 Demographic transitions and changing living arrangements of children

The transformation of Europe's demographic regime over the past three decades has led to considerable changes in the 'configuration of family members' with whom European children 'travel through life' (Hareven, 2000: 107). During what is now commonly known as 'Europe's second demographic transition', age at marriage rose, childbearing was postponed, and there was an increase in childlessness and the popularity of cohabitation and nonmarital fertility (Lesthaeghe, 1995). There was also an increase in rates of union disruption, and a

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large proportion of men and women entering marriage or some other form of union did so in the wake of an earlier union disruption (Van De Kaa, 1987). These changes significantly affected the composition and size of the networks available to children (Andersson, 2002; Heuveline & Timberlake, 2002). In the 1980s and 1990s, most countries observed a noticeable reduction in the length of time that children lived with both their married biological parents up until the age of 15; from around 12 years to less than 10 years. The increase in time not spent with married parents corresponds in some countries to time spent with a single mother; in others, to parental nonmarital cohabitation.

This transformation of the Western family led to popular and academic concern about its impact on children. Researchers considered the implications of this change in family structure in terms of a variety of outcomes. Sociological studies linked the living arrangements of children to such later-life outcomes as school dropout, drug use, age at marriage, marital dissolution, and adult and old-age mortality (Albrecht & Teachman, 2003; Hansagi, Brandt, & Andréasson, 2000; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Modin, 2003; Teachman, 2004). Psychologists studied the effects of parental divorce during childhood and of growing up in an incomplete family on children's adjustment, on cognitive ability, on behavior problems and on the mental health of young adults (Amato & Keith, 1991; Aughinbaugh, Pierret, & Rothstein, 2005; Chase-Landale & Cherlin, 1995).

The second demographic transition also further reduced the number of siblings children grew up with. Being raised in a large or small family affects the welfare of children and their future life chances. It affects competition for parents' time and resources, and has major implications for a child's subsequent social, educational and economic status during adulthood (Hernandez & Myers, 1993). A consistent finding over the decades is that the fewer offspring parents have, the higher their investment (time and money) in each of their children as they grow up, and the higher the child's educational progress and occupational status in adulthood (Downey, 1995; Steelman, Powell, Werum, & Carter, 2002).

Debates about the implications of children growing up in a specific family situation tend to set the complexity and instability of the contemporary family against the pattern of family life that was, until recently, considered normal for children – namely 'a single marriage for two adults, contracted at a relatively early age and enduring for perhaps 50 years, with children spending their entire early lives in this family, with both natural parents and usually one or a few siblings' (Cherlin, 1992: 6-30). This style of family was regarded as the 'summit of social evolution', and the standard against which all other forms of families were measured (Scanzoni, 2001) but was itself the result of demographic changes that took place between the last quarter of the 19th century and the beginning of World War II. Large numbers of siblings, a high proportion of lone parents and a high frequency of broken marriages – the essential characteristics of the pre-transition regime – gave way to the quintessential model of family life: The nuclear family.

This led some authors to point to similarities between the experiences of children in present-day families and those born in the 19th century (Griffith, 1980; Hareven, 2000). Some suggested that children born after the mid-1960s had to contend with a degree of family instability and family complexity similar to that of children born before the beginning of the 20th century. High adult mortality during this period meant that these children often experienced the disruption of their parents' marriage, and it was also common for a surviving parent to remarry following the loss of their spouse. The net result was a complex family structure in which children co-resided with stepparents and stepsiblings (Dupâquier, Helin, Laslett, Livi-Bacci, & Sogner, 1981). Another parallel is that lone parenthood and cohabitation outside marriage were not unusual in the 19th century either. Many working class people preferred to form a household without marrying (Matovic, 1990) and, up until 1880, a high proportion of children in large cities were born out of wedlock (Shorter, Knodel, & Van de Walle, 1971). Contemporary issues such as 'family fragmentation' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1994), coupled with the current high incidence of nonmarital childbearing and the presence of stepsiblings, played a role in this historical context as well.

2.3   Problems in historical studies

Studies focusing on changes in the living arrangements of children have rarely attempted to simultaneously analyze the impact of the first and the second demographic transitions. Historians rarely go beyond the heyday of the 'intimate family', whereas the 'decline' of nuclear families generally forms the starting point for sociological analysis.

It is primarily the paucity and poor quality of historical data that limits the potential of research in this area. Comparisons between the living arrangements of contemporary children and those of children raised in the second half of the 20th century or between 1880 and 1922 are usually made by contrasting the demographic parameters of the periods in question. But demographic parameters don't provide information about the actual living arrangements of children: they do not deal with coresidence, take no account of the continuously changing fertility and mortality conditions, and do not factor in the strong interdependencies between demographic parameters. Studies of the contemporary living arrangements of children can be based on retrospective surveys or panel data, but these datasets only go back to cohorts born in the 1930s or 1940s. For children born prior to that period, historical data has to be used.

Aggregate census listings are commonly used for this purpose, but these rarely give information about the position of children within a family or their relationship to adults living in the household. It's not possible, for example, to distinguish between children who are part of a reconstituted family and those who are the child of a new couple. Census listings at the individual level, which give the ages of *all* household members and their relationship to the head of the household unit, often only survived in the case of small and specific segments of the population, and this, too, makes it difficult to distinguish between biological and step relations between children and parents. Census listings are essentially cross-sectional in nature

and are therefore unable to show the sequence of events children have experienced (Kertzer, 1985; King, 1990; Ruggles, 1990).

As a way round this lack of historical data on the living arrangements of children, demographers and historians have turned to theoretical models. What theoretical models basically do is describe family composition as the outcome of demographic events (Pullum, 1982). *Micro simulation* models have become particularly popular (Smith, 2000). Virtually all of these theoretical models include only demographic parameters and, as such, are abstractions from reality that cannot be used as substitutes for empirical data. Most models relate to populations where there is no change in the demographic parameters over time, and most are based on simplified assumptions about demographic processes, particularly for the pre-1900 period (Watkins, Menken, & Bongaarts, 1987). Simulation outputs are therefore not equivalent to the outcomes of empirical studies and hardly do justice to the historical reality.

Because the existing data and models provide an inadequate basis for fully describing long-term changes in the living arrangements of children, we have tried to fill the gap in our knowledge by analyzing data from two different sources, which between them span the experiences of children born between 1850 and 1985, namely municipal population registers and a retrospective survey. These datasets had two things in common: firstly, they enabled us to obtain a child-centered perspective on the type and number of people the child was living with during the first stage of its life and, secondly, they followed children on a day-by-day basis. Data that permit such an approach is virtually non-existent, particularly for historical populations. Another common feature of the datasets is that they enabled us to examine whether the living arrangements of children differed according to social class. Mortality, extramarital, marital fertility, marriage, and divorce have always been characterized by variation between social groups, and living arrangements are profoundly affected by residential decisions based on economic and cultural considerations, such as the family economy and social norms. These factors will have led to a large degree of variation in family situations between social classes, and it is advisable to take this into account if one wishes to present a realistic picture of the living arrangements of children.

2.4   Aim of this study

In this study, we focus particular attention on the presence or absence of two groups of key people in the child's development during the first 15 years of its life: namely, the biological parents and the siblings. After introducing our data, we begin by mapping time trends in the percentage of children raised in a complete family. We then describe the trends over time of various situations in which at least one of the biological parents is absent. We briefly describe trends in the number of siblings, and then focus on differentials by social class and education of the parents in the various family situations.

Although our emphasis was on changes in the living arrangements of children in the Netherlands, the results of our research also apply more generally to the countries of Western

and northern Europe. The Netherlands has been characterized by a family form that was comparable to that of most other countries in Western and northern Europe (Lynch, 2003), and it underwent the first demographic transitions at roughly the same time and pace (Reher, 2004). Similarly, there was a large degree of consistency in the shifts in patterns of partnership formation and dissolution and in the strength of the association between marriage and childbearing occurring in European countries after the mid-1960s, although the there are differences in detail, depending in part on religion and welfare policies (Allan et al., 2001).

2.5 Method

2.5.1 Data

To study the living arrangements of children, we combined survey data for children born from 1923 onwards with historical data obtained from population registers for children born between 1850 and 1922.

Population registers in Belgium, the Netherlands and parts of Italy combine census listings with vital registration in a linked format for the entire population of a municipality (Alter, 1988). Continuous population registers, which recorded the population that was legally residing within the municipality, began in the Netherlands with the 1849 census. The returns from this census were copied into the population register, and from then on, all changes occurring in a household over the next decade were recorded in the register. In most municipalities, this procedure was repeated with each subsequent 10-year census. Each household was entered on a double page, with the head of the household first; he was followed by his wife (in case the head was a married male), children, relatives, and other members of the household (see Figure 2.1). The register recorded the date and place of birth of each individual, their relation to the head of the household, and their sex, marital status, occupation and religion. New household members who arrived after the registration had started were added to the list of individuals already recorded, and those who died or migrated and were therefore no longer part of the household were deleted, and the place and date of migration or date of death was recorded. Residents were required by law to report migration between municipalities at both the place of origin and at their destination. The registers therefore provide information about demographic events leading to changes in the composition and size of households, including characteristics of the person undergoing that particular event. In most municipalities, population registers remained in use until 1910 or 1920, after which date a new form of continuous registration was introduced, consisting of loose sheets – so-called *gezinskaarten* or family cards. The unit of registration then ceased to be the household and became the family. This situation continued until 1939. By tracking individuals in the consecutive registers and, in the case of migration, in the population registers of the new place of residence, it is possible to track the living arrangements of the child over a long period of time (Janssens, 1993).

Figure 2.1: An example page of the population register around 1850

Left page: Date of entry, last name, first name, sex, relation to head of the household, date of birth, place of birth, civil status, date of change

Right page: Religion, profession, address, date of arrival, municipality of origin, date of leaving, place of destination, date of decease, official place of living, remarks

It would be unwise to assume that the information given in the registers is always accurate (Knotter & Meijer, 1995). The first register, for example, which covered the period 1850-1859, did not include a separate column stating the relationship of individuals to the head of the household. Having said that, in virtually all cases, it was relatively easy to infer their most likely relationship to the head of the household based on such characteristics as the order of registration, their sex, name and date of birth or on the basis of the vital registration system. Underreporting of co-residing extended kin members will also have occurred, particularly when co-residence was only for a brief period. In practice, it was sometimes difficult to determine which members belonged to which household at a given point in time. Some individuals left their place of residence without correctly registering their place of destination, which made it very difficult to track them. In several municipalities, (parts of) the population registers failed to survive WWII or other calamities.

Historical Data: The Historical Sample of the Netherlands (HSN)
The historical data on the living arrangements of children, as recorded in the population registers, were collected within the context of the so-called Historical Sample of the Netherlands (HSN), a national database containing information on the complete life histories of a 0.5% random sample (76,700 birth records) of men and women born in the Netherlands between 1812 and 1922 (Mandemakers, 2001). Our study only used data on children born between 1850 and 1922 in three of the 11 Dutch provinces – Zeeland, Utrecht and Friesland - giving a total of 7,684 births that were fairly evenly distributed over the three areas.

Figure 2.2: Probability of death (per 1,000) by age in the Netherlands:
Period 1850-1980
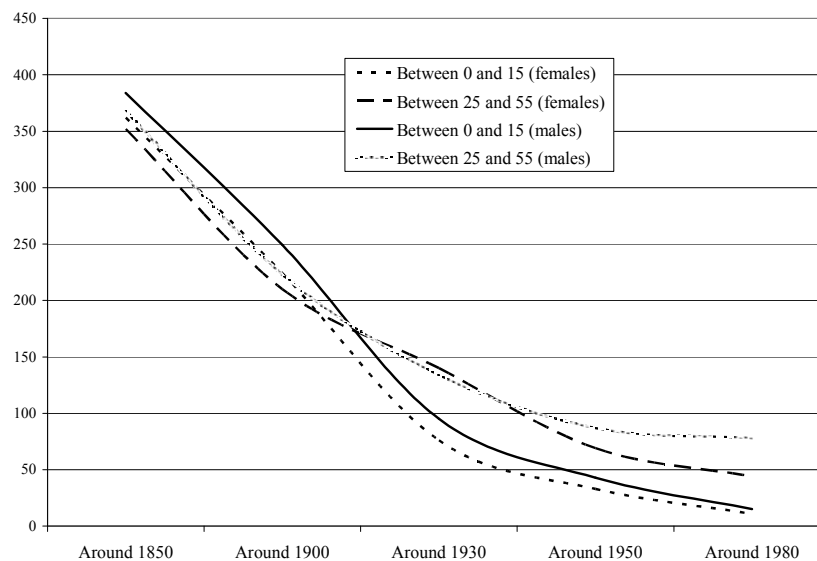
The three specific provinces were selected because they are where the collection of information has progressed most. Zeeland and Friesland were rural areas for a long time, although both provinces had a number of old, smaller towns with around 15-20,000 inhabitants by the mid-1850s. The economy of both regions began to change from 1900 onwards, when industrialization took place. Utrecht, situated in the center of the country, was more urban and its capital city grew from 48,000 inhabitants in 1850 to 155,000 in 1930. Not as much for Utrecht, but in both Zeeland and Friesland Protestantism was clearly the most important denomination: Among the Catholics (e.g. Limburg and Brabant), fertility was higher around 1900. As a group, the three provinces can be regarded as fairly representative of the demographic regime of the Netherlands as a whole as far as demographic factors affecting the living arrangements of children are concerned. Figure 2.1 depicts the mortality before age 15 and the mortality in adulthood for the Netherlands as a whole for the three periods.

Contemporary Data: The Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS)
Although generally more lacking in depth, data from historical population registers are comparable to the household data which have enabled sociologists and demographers over the past two decades to study the living arrangements of children in contemporary societies. In this study, we use retrospective data on the childhood living arrangements of respondents derived from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) - a large-scale survey of the nature and strength of family ties in the Netherlands carried out between 2002 and 2004.

Table 2.1 Description of the HSN and NKPS data by birth cohort and province

		Birth cohort	Zeeland	Utrecht	Friesland	N Total	% Total
At birth	HSN	1850-1879	1,239	1,207	1,059	3,505	45.6
		1880-1899	609	774	592	1,975	25.7
		1900-1922	624	909	671	2,204	28.7
		Total	*2,472*	*2,890*	*2,322*	*7,684*	*100.0*
At age 15	HSN	1850-1879	703	707	592	2,002	39.3
		1880-1899	435	535	377	1,347	26.5
		1900-1922	476	714	550	1,740	34.2
		Total	*1,614*	*1,956*	*1,519*	*5,089*	*100.0*
	NKPS	1923-39	-	-	-	2,090	25.6
		1940-64	-	-	-	3374	41.3
		1965-74	-	-	-	1,796	22.1
		1975-85	-	-	-	901	11.0
		Total				*8,161*	*100.0*

Table 2.2 Description of the HSN and NKPS data by social class father

	Social class father	N at birth	% at birth	N at age 15	% at age 15
HSN	Farm workers	2,713	35.3	1,697	33.4
	Workers	2,702	35.2	1,793	35.2
	Farmers	917	11.9	666	13.1
	Middle	864	11.2	605	11.9
	High	488	6.4	328	6.5
	Total	*7,684*	*100.0*	*5,089*	*100.0*
				N Total	% Total
NKPS	Education low	-	-	4,725	57.9
	Education middle	-	-	2,064	25.3
	Education high	-	-	1,365	16.7
	Total			*8,154*	*100.0*

Computer-assisted personal interviews were conducted with over 8,000 men and women aged 18 to 79 who formed a random sample of adults residing in private households in the Netherlands. The collection of data from the main respondents – the *anchors* - involved a face-to-face interview about the anchor's life course and actual living situation and their relationship with family members - the so-called 'alters'.

At the end of the interview, the anchor was given a questionnaire to complete. The response rate was 45%, which is comparable to that of other large-scale family surveys in the Netherlands (Dykstra et al., 2005).

In this study, we used retrospective data on the childhood of the main respondent, which depicted their successive living arrangements during the first 15 years of their life, as was the case in the HSN dataset. Compared with prospective data, retrospective data on living arrangements suffer from several limitations, such as recall problems. Yet studies have shown retrospectively collected factual data - such as fertility histories, family characteristics and employment careers – to be reasonably accurate (Blossfeld & Rohwer, 1995). Another drawback of retrospective studies is that they are, by definition, based only on survivors. Those who have died or migrated are excluded, giving rise to biases; this selection effect will of course be more marked in older cohorts.

One thing we can be certain of is that children growing up in an incomplete family were probably underrepresented in the sample we used, because children born out of wedlock or who grew up in a family that had experienced divorce or the death of the parent were less likely to survive (Hansagi et al., 2000; Modin, 2003; Van Poppel, 2000). Tables 2.1 and 2.2 summarize the characteristics of both the HSN data and the NKPS data.

2.5.2 Analysis

To ascertain the living arrangements of the children in our study, we calculated at each year of the child's life what percentage of children were still living (a) with their biological parents, (b) without either biological parent, or (c) with a stepparent. Although data were available for children at every age, we only used data relating to the child's situation at birth and at age 15. To depict time trends, we differentiated between seven birth cohorts. The first coincided with the period before the decline in fertility and infant and childhood mortality (1850-79). The second cohort coincided with the first stage of the first demographic transition, which was characterized by decreases in fertility and mortality (1880-99) and the third cohort coincided with the last stage of that transition (1900-22).[4] The data for these three early birth cohorts were derived from the Historical Sample of the Netherlands; data for the post-1922 cohorts were all derived from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study. We distinguished the pre-WWII (1923-39) and post-WWII birth cohorts (1940-64) from children born in the early stage (1965-74) and more recent stage (1975-85) of the second demographic transition. Data for later birth cohorts were not available.

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[4] The basic household and family structures of Western and northern Europe changed very little until the start of the demographic transition of the 1870s and 1880s (Lynch 2003, 216-217; Thornton 2001). We therefore believe that our findings in relation to the living arrangements of children from the 1850-79 birth cohort also apply more generally to the early 19th century.

2.6   Results

2.6.1   Growing up in a complete family

The overwhelming majority of children in all birth cohorts grew up with both their biological parents. Yet Figure 2.3 shows that the percentage of children living with both biological parents changed dramatically across the birth cohorts. This is particularly true if we compare the situation of children born in the mid-19th century with those growing up in later periods. In the 1850-79 cohort, about 9% of children had lost one or both of their parents before or at birth and at age 15, that percentage had increased to 34%, whereas children from particularly the 1880-99 birth cohort had a strongly increased chance of growing up in a *complete* family. This was due to the increased survival rates of fathers and mothers, and a decrease in the percentage of children born out of wedlock. The further decline in adult mortality and out-of-wedlock fertility that occurred after 1900 - and which was not offset by the modest increase in divorce - enabled the generations born between 1900 and 1940 to pave the way for the complete family to eventually become the standard living arrangement of children. The cohort born in the early stage of the second demographic transition (1965-74) was the first to experience something of a return to the situation which was characteristic for children born in the mid-19th century; a sharp rise in divorce and an increase in the percentage of children born out of wedlock were the factors behind this reversal of trends. In the most recent cohort - children born after 1975 - as many as 85% of children at age 15 were living in a 'complete' family. But the differences compared with the situation of children born in the mid-19th century are still enormous. A comparison of the earliest and most recent of our cohorts clearly illustrates that growing up in a non-intact family today remains far less common than it was a century ago.

2.6.2   Growing up in an incomplete family

If children were not being raised in a complete family, what sort of family situation *were* they living in? Figure 2.4 shows that in the mid-19th century, at the time of birth, a considerable percentage – almost 5% - of children lived with their mother, but without a father or stepfather - in most cases, these were children living with an unmarried mother. Figure 2.3 shows that, at age 15, approximately 9% of the children were in this situation.

The reason these latter children were living in this type of one-parent family was primarily due to the woman losing her spouse and not remarrying. The percentage of children growing up in a mother-only family fell until the 1940-65 cohort, but increased again in the more recent birth cohorts. But here again, children born after 1975 were less frequently raised in this sort of situation than children born in the 1850-79 period. This recent increase was due not only to a rise in extramarital fertility, but also to a rise in the divorce rate, thereby making divorce, rather than death, the main reason for a mother-only living arrangement.

Figure 2.3: Percentage of children living with both biological parents in the Netherlands: Birth cohorts 1850-1985

Source: Cohorts 1850-1922 HSN; Cohorts 1923-1985 NKPS

Figure 2.4: Percentage of children living in an incomplete family at birth in the Netherlands: Birth cohorts 1850-1985

Source: Cohorts 1850-1922 HSN; Cohorts 1923-1985 NKPS
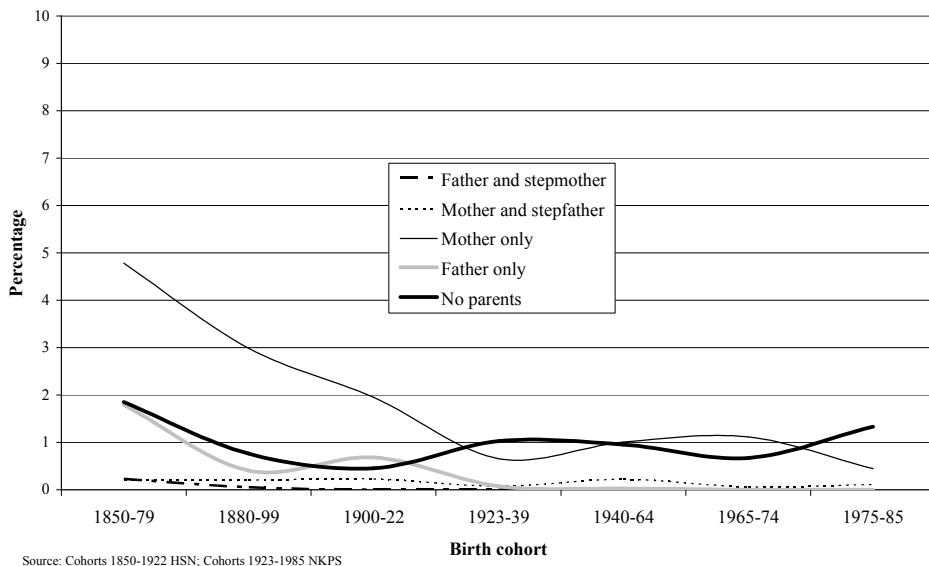
Figure 2.5: Percentage of children living in an incomplete family at age 15 in the
Netherlands: Birth cohorts 1850-1985

Source: Cohorts 1850-1922 HSN; Cohorts 1923-1985 NKPS
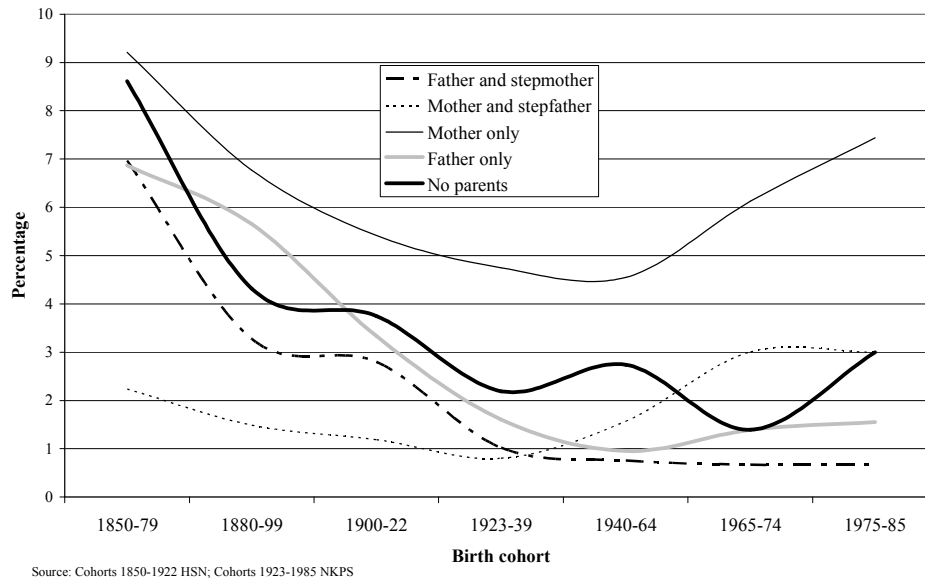
A much smaller percentage of children lived without their biological mother or a
stepmother. In the older generations, living without a mother was mainly due to death of the
biological mother, often shortly after the birth of the child. Although it was, and continues to
be, much more common for widowers to remarry than it is for widows, a relatively high
percentage of widowers failed to find a new spouse (Van Poppel, 1995; 1998). As time went
on, single fatherhood increasingly became due to the divorce of the biological parents. Young
children tended to remain in the custody of the mother, which is why the gradual increase in
the divorce rate only resulted in a modest increase in lone parenthood among fathers. In the
most recent cohort, fewer than 2% of the 15-year-olds lived with their father only.

Figures 2.4 and 2.5 show interesting gender disparities in the changing frequencies of
lone parenthood. These disparities are the result of the different chances of widows and
widowers and female and male divorcees finding a new spouse for themselves and a
stepparent for the child. As the Figures show, it was not very common in the 19th century for a
child to co-reside with a biological mother and a stepfather: even among 15-year-olds born in
1850-79, this was only the case for 2% of the children.

This percentage continued to decrease until WWII. Since then, this living arrangement
has become slightly more common, and in the most recent birth cohort (1975-85), 3% of
children were living with a stepfather. Once again, the rising divorce rate resulted in
increasing percentages of children living in reconstituted families that included the biological
mother. On the other hand, 7% of the 15-year-olds in the oldest birth cohort (1850-79) lived
with their biological father and a stepmother.

Figure 2.6: Mean number of siblings alive at the time of birth of the child in the Netherlands: Birth cohorts 1850-1985

Source: Cohorts 1850-1922 HSN; Cohorts 1923-1985 NKPS

This percentage fell sharply after 1900; since the 1920s, fewer than 1% of all 15-year-old children have lived with their father and a stepmother.

The likelihood of growing up without either biological parent fell sharply over time: at age 15, almost 9% of children born in the mid-19th century found themselves in such a situation. This percentage fell to 2% for the 1960-75 cohort and to 3% for the 1975-85 cohort. In the oldest cohorts, some of these children lived with a stepparent, but most lived in a family with an uncle and/or aunt or grandparent(s): living without members of the kin network was very much the exception. In more recent cohorts, living without either biological parent meant children were either living with foster parents or were in a boarding school.

2.6.3 Growing up in the presence of siblings

Siblings – including stepbrothers and stepsisters - were by far the most numerous group in Dutch households[5] and this category of kin was more sensitive to demographic changes than any other group: between 1880 and 1937, the average number of children Dutch women had fell from 5.57 to 2.57, whereas after 1966 the total fertility rate (TFR) decreased further to 1.65. This decline in the potential number of siblings was partly offset by a fall in infant and

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[5] Dutch families as far back as the 17th century included extremely small numbers of non-kin (Damsma, 1993; Haks, 1982; Van der Woude, 1972). In our study, from the earliest cohort onwards, non-kin were only present in very small numbers, and they had virtually disappeared from the household from the 1860s onwards. Members of the wider kin network also gradually vanished from the household in which children grew up. It was very rare for grandparents to co-reside with their children. The conjugal family therefore increasingly became the norm from the 1860s onwards.

child mortality. Newborn children in 1850 had a 71% chance of reaching the age of five; for children in the 1990s, the figure was more than 99%. So what impact did this historical shift towards small families have on the number of brothers and sisters children grew up with? To find this out, we calculated how many siblings were living in the household at the time of the child's birth.

As Figure 2.6 shows, the mean number of siblings in the household at the time of birth of the child first showed an increase between 1850 and 1890-1900. This was due to increased fertility, which was itself a consequence of a fall in the age at marriage, but above all to a decrease in early childhood and infant mortality. For a number of decades, children spent their childhood in the company of, on average, three brothers and sisters. The number of siblings decreased only after 1900 when the decline in fertility, which had begun around 1880, gained momentum. After 1920, and again after 1960, the mean number of siblings children grew up with fell dramatically (below one). Thus, it was only from the cohort born in the years 1923-39 on that children grew up with a significantly lower number of siblings than in the 19th century.

2.6.4   Variation according to socio-economic status

The revolution in living arrangements experienced by Dutch children did not affect all parts of society to the same extent and at the same time. The demographic parameters that determine the living arrangements of children – such as adult and childhood mortality levels, extramarital and marital fertility levels, ages at marriage, and remarriage and divorce rates - have always been characterized by variation between social groups. In the 19th century, there was a clear social class gradient in adult mortality levels. The chances of children experiencing the death of a parent were higher in the lower social class. Nonmarital fertility was also concentrated in the lower social classes, resulting in noticeable differences in the percentages of children living without a biological father. The risk of divorce also varied according to social class: Especially in recent cohorts, divorce rate were much higher in the upper class (Van Poppel, 1997). Such differences in the relevant demographic parameters are also evident in the most recent period. Innovators of demographic change in the Netherlands, for example, were predominantly found in the 1970s and 1980s among better educated couples (De Feijter, 1991; Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). We might therefore expect there to be a considerable degree of variation in family situations according to social class (in the case of the historical cohorts) and the educational levels of the parents (in the case of the more recent cohorts).

As far as we are aware, no one has ever studied historical differences in the living arrangements of children from various social classes. The two datasets we used allowed us to examine whether the living arrangements of children differed, and still differ, according to social class and educational status. For our historical cohorts, we used data on the occupation

of the child's father at the time of the child's birth. These occupational data were classified into a social class scheme recently proposed by Van Leeuwen and Maas (2005).

This scheme differentiates between 12 classes, but because of the small numbers involved, we merged these into three classes with more or less comparable living conditions and focused, for reasons of comparability and presentation, on two of them: '*High and middle class*' (Senior managers, Higher professionals, Lower managers, Lower professionals and clerical and sales personnel, Lower clerical and sales personnel and Foremen), and '*Workers*' (Skilled workers, Lower-skilled workers, Unskilled workers, Lower-skilled farm workers and Unskilled farm workers). In the NKPS dataset, children were classified according to the highest level of education the father had completed with a qualification. A distinction was made between fathers with high/middle and low educational levels.

Figures 2.7 and 2.8 depict the presence or absence of parents by birth cohort and social class/ level of education. The most striking feature is the reversal that has taken place in the position of high and low social groups in the percentages of time that children lived with both biological parents: whereas living in a complete family was less common for working class children born before 1923, in more recent cohorts, the lowest percentage of time spent in a complete family was found among the group with high/middle educational levels.

In the 19th-century cohorts, children living without a (step)father were more commonly found among workers than among the middle/upper social classes; most were the children of unmarried mothers. This is why social differences were more marked at birth than at age 15. Here, too, there has been a reversal of the position of the lower and upper/middle social classes: from birth cohort 1923-45 on, it was more common for children from upper/middle class backgrounds to live without a (step)father. The situation changed again from birth cohort 1975-85 on. Whereas in the first half of the twentieth century divorce rates were still higher among the highly-educated, from the 1970s on divorce became more frequent among the lower-educated parts of society. In the past, children from the higher social classes spent almost the same amount of time without a (step)mother as was the case in other social groups; however, in the more recent cohorts, barely any differences between social classes were to be found. Living with a stepmother and their biological father was a little bit less common for children from the lower classes in cohorts born before WW I but in later cohorts hardly any social class differences could be observed. Living with a mother and stepfather became in particular more common among children from the highly-educated parts of society.

Figure 2.7: Average percentage living in different living arrangements between birth and age 15 in the Netherlands: Low social class/educational level of father: Birth cohorts 1850-1985
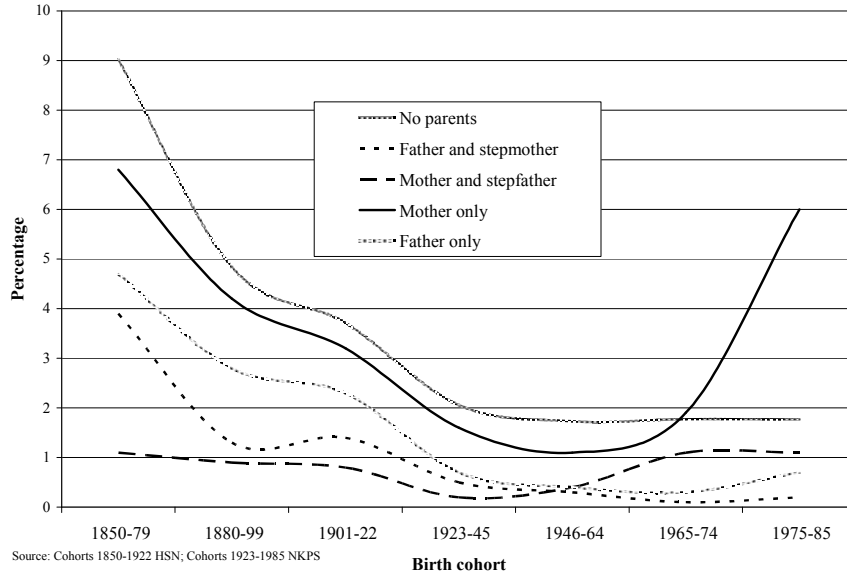
Figure 2.8: Average percentage living in different living arrangements between birth and age 15 in the Netherlands: Middle/high social class/educational level of father: Birth cohorts 1850-1985
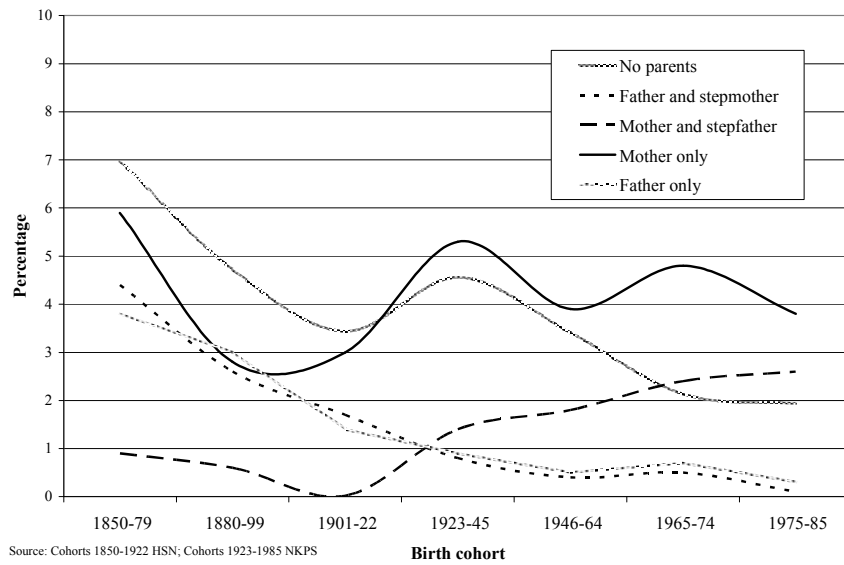
2.7   Conclusion and discussion

Compared with the nineteenth century, the nuclear family in the Netherlands is still very much alive. Today, growing up in an incomplete family remains much less common than it was a century and a half ago. For children born between 1880 and 1964, there was a continuous increase in the percentage living with both their biological parents. It is only in the most recent generation that this trend began to reverse. The percentage of children growing up without a biological father or a stepfather or without a biological mother or stepmother has decreased until the generations born directly after WW II before it started to rise again. Growing up with a mother but without a (step)father became more common again for children born after the mid-1960s, reaching almost 19th-century percentages again. One very interesting finding was the opposing trend in the percentage of children living with their mother and a stepfather (which showed an increase) and the percentage living with their biological father and a stepmother (where a decrease was visible). We also found that children in the mid-19th century grew up with a limited number of siblings and that that number increased until the end of the 19th century. It was only from the 1920s onwards that small families became the norm for some decades: The beginning of the change of the family structure form a pyramid form towards a beanpole-like structure.

We observed differences over time in the living arrangements of the different social classes. In the past, spending one's childhood in a complete family was less common among the working classes, whereas in the more recent cohorts, it was less common for children of better educated parents than children of less well-educated parents to be living in a 'complete' family.

There was also a reversal in the percentages of children living only with their mother; in the past, it was mostly working class children who grew up without a (step)father, whereas today this is much more common among children with high/middle levels of education.

Although our study focuses on *historical* changes in living arrangements in only one fairly small country, we believe our findings have relevance for other countries and for other disciplines as well. Explanations for family behaviors require comparisons across contemporary and historical social and cultural contexts to establish which characteristics of family life are common aspects and which are not (Seltzer et al., 2005). Many of the demographic factors which affect the living arrangements of children have developed in an identical way in other countries in the Western world.

We realize that the changes in the structural characteristics of living arrangements of children tell only part of the story. We give here three examples. In the nineteenth century it was open to discussion whether or not servants or lodgers were part of the household but the question of who is a family member nowadays raises much more fundamental issues. Membership of key persons in households and families can no longer be categorized in an unproblematic way: Children may be thought of as members of different households for different activities or be partial members of households (for example of their nonresidential

biological father) for some periods of the week but not others. In particular the physical boundaries around both one-parent and stepfamily households have become more permeable. The emphasis on continued parental involvement has as a consequence that parents are encouraged to sustain a relationship with their children even when they no longer live together. This has implications for the ways in living arrangements of children have to be understood (Allan et al., 2001).

The current pattern of a great number of fatherless children and blended families has some resemblance with the past patterns but there are also differences. When remarriage occurs after divorce (as opposed to after the death of one partner) the biological partner remains. In the past, if the surviving parent began a new relationship, it usually resulted in marriage; in contemporary single-parent families, the mother or father does not always marry his or her new partner (Hareven, 2000).

In the past three decades a growing diversity in family patterns was brought about by increasing levels of migration into European societies from countries with quite distinct religious and ethnic traditions. The migration process often involved family members moving a considerable time before others, and thus itself generated disrupted family patterns (Allan et al., 2001). In both our datasets children from migrants were included: approximately five percent of respondents in the NKPS study were non-native Dutch, meaning that both parents were born outside the Netherlands and of the parents of children in the HSN-data set 2.2 percent were born outside the Netherlands. The numbers of migrants were much too small to focus on living arrangements of this group specifically yet the background of these migrants has completely changed over the past century and a half.

The issue of how the living arrangements of children are structured and change over time is relevant to a variety of disciplines.

Our data are important to historians because they provide us with information about empirical changes in the living arrangements of children that is better than theoretical models can provide. They help to explain how demographic changes in the past century and a half have changed the opportunities for children to interact with key family members. Due to the decline in adult mortality, the decrease in out-of-wedlock fertility, and rather low divorce frequencies, the number of years of shared lives between generations in the cohorts born between 1900 and 1965 was greater than at any time in history. Demographic opportunities enabled fathers, mothers and children to go through life together and it is reasonable to suppose that this has increased the significance of the intergenerational bond between children and parents (Bengtson, 2001). In light of today's high incidence of divorce and nonmarital childbearing and childrearing, the part that quasi-kin, such as non-biological parents, can play in the child's welfare has received a great deal of attention. Our study has shown that, in the historical context of the Netherlands, stepmothers were indeed fairly frequently part of the living arrangements of the child and that stepfathers were rather rare.

A great deal of research by sociologists and psychologists uses individual development across the life course and the role of context in shaping family behavior as orienting conceptual frameworks. Social context and individual experiences, together with biological constraints, are the factors that contribute to individual development. Establishing how the network of family members the children interacted with changed, and how it varied according to social class, is essential information that can help broaden our insight into the factors that shape behavior (Coontz, 2000; Seltzer et al., 2005).

Our study has brought to light the historical experiences of children in the past and variations in the processes that determined their familial situation. Changes in context may have a direct impact on children.[6] Sigle-Rushton et al. (2005), for example, point to decreases over time in the link between growing up in a particular living arrangement and subsequent wellbeing. For example, as growing up in a broken home becomes more commonplace, the average child of a divorced family comes from a less troubled family; as alternative family structures become more widely accepted, divorce will be less of a stigma and the negative effects of community disapproval should lessen.

It is essential to bring popular ideas about the past more into line with the demographic facts of the recent and more distant past (Thornton, 2001). The finding that the happy family of father and mother lived together with a moderate number of their biological children cannot be used as *the* baseline category for the experiences of children from recent birth cohorts. We believe family decline is a temporary development within a much broader process of family change. Further studies with such long term perspectives are needed to understand the stability and changes in the importance of family life and its relationships for individuals.

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[6] Our data provide an opportunity to study some of the effects of long-term changes in the family arrangements of children on their lives as adults. Some of the adult outcomes of children's early living arrangements that could be studied include status of the first job, age at first marriage, parenthood, divorce and survival. This may enable us to find out how the role of fathers and mothers has changed over time and how this has affected the life course of children. It is highly probable that, compared with today, the death of a parent had far more dire implications for 19th and early 20th century children: people were far more dependent on the household to produce goods and services essential for survival, and prevailing systems of division of labor made families very dependent on the household head as the main provider of goods.

CHAPTER 3

PARENT-CHILD CONTACT:
THE ROLE OF THE SIBLING NETWORK

3. PARENT-CHILD CONTACT: THE ROLE OF THE SIBLING NETWORK [7, 8]

3.1 Introduction

Studying parent-child face-to-face contact is of high societal interest in present-day society, because it helps to predict under what conditions ageing parents lack practical support and possibly require formal services (Litwak & Kulis, 1987; Riley, 1983). Most research on parent-child contact has focused on the relationship a parent has with a specific child: the oldest, the one who lives nearest, the most supportive, or the one with whom the parent has the closest relationship (Rogerson, Weng, & Lin, 1993). A drawback of such a selection is that one is left guessing about the role of the other siblings. In this study we investigate a representative sample of randomly selected parent-child dyads.

3.2 Research question

Apart from geographic proximity (Litwak, 1960), family size has been shown to be a strong determinant of intergenerational contact (Fokkema, De Ruijter, & Maas, 2003; Lye, 1996; Silverstein, Parrott, & Bengtson, 1995; Tomassini et al., 2004; Uhlenberg & Cooney, 1990). Adult children with several siblings interact less frequently with their parents than those from small families. We will argue that siblings influence the relationships children have with their parents in more ways than just through their numbers (McHale & Crouter, 2004).

The sibling tie is the family relationship with the longest duration (Matthews, 2002; Voorpostel, 2007). Although investments in parent-child relationships are essentially dyadically based, they are subject to the influence of the network in which they are embedded (cf. Uehara, 1990). Parent-child ties within a family are characterized by interdependency: A child's interactions with its parents are influenced by the position of that child within the sibling network (cf. Kelley et al., 2003; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). In this study we examine (a) characteristics of the sibling network, and (b) the position of the adult child vis-à-vis its siblings. Our research question is: *To what extent are differences in adult child-parent contact*

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accounted for by aggregate characteristics of the sibling network and by the position of the adult child in that network?

3.3 Dyadic contact within networks

Most studies on intergenerational contact are dyadically based. In general, individuals vary in the need for and opportunities to contact their parents or children. Needs are structured by biographical time (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Settersten & Mayer, 1997). In the establishment phase of early adulthood the child generally needs more parental attention (Gulbrandsen & Langsether, 2000). In old age, health problems occur and the parents' authority tends to decline as their dependency increases and the authority of children over their parents' lives grows (George, 1986).

Opportunities for parent-child contact are enhanced if the investment of time and effort to get together are low. Findings consistent with these ideas come from a wide range of North American and European studies. For instance, contact frequency is higher if perceived family values are more traditional: values make it harder to decrease contact. Contact frequency is lower if the two homes (geographical) or hearts (emotional) are more distant (Hank, 2005; Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson, 1994; Litwak & Kulis, 1987; Tomassini, Wolf, & Rosina, 2003).

Contact can also be seen as a return on investments made by parents in their offspring earlier in life, such as love, care and money (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Silverstein, 2004). Parent-child contact frequency has also been shown to be higher if parental investments during childhood were larger in terms of time (De Graaf & Fokkema, 2007; Grundy, 2005; Klein Ikkink & van Tilburg, 1999; Kulis, 1992; Silverstein, Conroy, Wang, Giarrusso, & Bengtson, 2002) or affection (Downey, 1995; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998).

In this paper we aim to reach beyond the dyadic perspective and use a social network approach (Widmer, 1999; Widmer & La Farga, 2000) based on the influence of the sibling network on parent-child contact. To the extent that network characteristics have been considered, there has been a focus on gender composition (e.g. Coward & Dwyer, 1990; Spitze & Logan, 1991), birth-order effects (Houser, Berkman, & Bardsley, 1985), and the number of siblings (Downey, 1995; Matthews, 2004). In our view much is to be gained from a focus on the adult child vis-à-vis his or her siblings. We argue that parent-child interactions are structured by the presence and behavior of siblings (cf. Hechter, 1987; Homans, 1958). Matthews (2002), who conducted in-depth interviews with complete sets of siblings, showed, for example, that expectations about what siblings will do served in an adult child's decision to provide help and companionship to parents (Matthews, 2002).

Using conceptual tools from social network research (e.g. Widmer, 1999), we will venture beyond the dyadic approach in two ways. First, we will focus on the effect of being part of a particular sibling network and formulate hypotheses about aggregate characteristics of the sibling network. The aim here is to explain variation in contact among parent-child

dyads across families. Second, we will examine the child's position in the sibling network in order to explain variation in contact between parent-child dyads within the same family. We will do so by comparing frequency of contact in relation to the sibling network average.

3.4 Hypotheses

3.4.1 Network characteristics

Size. The investment in an intimate relationship depends strongly on the number of alternative exchange partners (Downey, 1995; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). A consistent finding is that each additional sibling lowers the average investment (e.g. contact and support) in single parent-child ties (see for overviews: Lye, 1996; Steelman, Powell, Werum, & Carter, 2002). *We expect that the larger the size of the sibling network, the lower the frequency of parent-child contact (H1).*

Gender. The common role of women in families is the one of 'kinkeeping'. Women tend to invest more time in family ties than men do. Sisters are more likely to feel responsible for personal contact, information flow, domestic maintenance, and the organization of ritual occasions (Cancian & Oliker, 2000; Rosenthal, 1985). And if parents need more care due to health problems, daughters tend to be (and are expected to be) the coordinators of care because they are ascribed to have more specialized knowledge about caring than sons do (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2005). We are interested in knowing whether having sisters leads to less contact with parents than having brothers. *We expect that the larger the number of sisters in the sibling network, the lower the frequency of parent-child contact (H2).*

Spacing. It has been argued in evolutionary psychology that a closer age spacing between siblings makes that they have more similar needs and compete among each other for parental resources (Hertwig, Davis, & Sulloway, 2002). Parents of closely spaced siblings spend more time meeting the developmental-dependent demands of children, such as feeding, scheduling, or care during illness. This may lower the quantity and quality of the parental investment per child during childhood and consequently lead to less mutual time investments in later life (cf. Homans, 1958; Uehara, 1990). *We expect that the closer the spacing of siblings, the lower the frequency of parent-child contact (H3).*

Stepsiblings. Divorce creates smaller, disrupted family networks, in which primary biological kin grow up in separate households. Repartnered parents invest less in young stepchildren than in their biological offspring (Zvoch, 1999). In families with members of mixed biological origin, there has been found to be more ambiguity and stress within parent-child dyads, which relates negatively to contact (Stewart, 2005). *We expect that the presence of stepsiblings is associated with lower frequency of parent-child contact (H4).*

Geographic dispersion. If the siblings' homes are located closer to each other, they have more opportunity for contact. In geographically more dispersed networks, the level of sibling contact tends to be lower. Siblings in such networks might coordinate visiting their

parents more often and use the parental home as a meeting point, such as at Christmas or birthdays. On average, however, fewer spontaneous visits will occur. And if the son and daughter live on opposite sides of the country, it is unlikely that parents will visit both. Especially in cases where a parent needs extra care, sibling contact and coordination can be an important instrument to arrange support for the parent more efficiently and more equally among siblings (Ingersoll-Dayton, Neal, Ha, & Hammer, 2003). *We expect that the greater the geographic dispersion, the lower the frequency of parent-child contact (H5).*

Cohesion. Having said that, siblings may still have strong ties and build a cohesive family group even if they live at a great distance from each other. They can instantly call and send each other e-mails or text messages. Cohesive networks facilitate contact because group norms tend to be stronger and the quality of network ties is higher in cohesive networks (Hechter, 1987). Siblings in more cohesive networks are likely to exchange more information about their parents and to coordinate visits to the parental home so that they can also get together themselves. *We expect that the lower the network cohesion, the lower the frequency of parent-child contact (H6).*

3.4.2 Position within the network

Relative geographical distance. We know that in case of an emergency, adult children visit and support their parents more often than other network members (Hogan & Eggebeen, 1995). But this is not only so in the case of need. If siblings live at varying distances from their parents, there is a high probability that those who live closest will visit their parents and vice versa, even if the difference in traveling time is only a few minutes (Matthews, 2002). *We expect that if a child has a sibling who lives closer to the parent than him/herself, the frequency of contact with the parent will be lower than the sibling network average (H7).*

Relative emotional distance. Emotional closeness is associated with relational strength, which is a tie-specific asset and cannot be transferred from one tie to another (Lawler & Yoon, 1996). Parents and children who are emotionally close are likely to invest more in their relationship and spend more time together than parents and children who are not emotionally close (Rohde et al., 2003). *We expect that if a child has a sibling who is emotionally closer to the parent than him/herself, the frequency of contact with the parent will be lower than the sibling network average (H8).*

Unequal financial support. Although parents generally strive to treat their children equally (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Silverstein, 2004), some children end up receiving more financial support than others because their needs are greater and parents respond to these needs (Kunemund, Motel-Klingebiel, & Kohli, 2005). Siblings on their part tend to compare what parents give each of them and are sensitive to acts of favoritism. What happens if the parent gives a large sum of money to one child, but not to the other? From an exchange perspective, the prediction is that contact with the 'relatively neglected' child will be negatively affected. *We expect that if a child has a sibling who receives financial support*

whereas he/she does not, the frequency of contact with the parent will be lower than the sibling network average (H9).

Birth order. The first-born has a unique status within the sibling network, contrary to the middle child and last-born (Kidwell, 1981). Studies on social mobility have shown that parents invest more in first-born than they do in later-born children (Plug & Vijverberg, 2001; Steelman et al., 2002). Based on exchange arguments, we expect that in later life the return on these investments between first-born and parents will be higher than in other parent-child dyads. *We expect that first-born adult children will have more contact with their parents than the sibling network average (H10).*

3.5   Method

3.5.1   Data

The data are from the public release file of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS), a large-scale survey on the nature and strength of family ties in the Netherlands (Dykstra et al., 2005). Between 2002 and 2004 computer-assisted personal interviews were held with 8,161 men and women aged 18 to 79 who formed a random sample of adults residing in private households in the Netherlands. Approximately 5% of respondents were non-native Dutch, meaning that both parents were born outside the Netherlands. The response rate was 45%, which is comparable to that of other large-scale family surveys in the Netherlands (see Dykstra et al., 2005).

One advantage of the NKPS data set is that it provides information about many different kinds of family relationships: ties with the partner, with parents, siblings, children, in-laws, and with friends. We focus on those individuals ($N = 2,583$) who had at least two adult children (i.e. 18 years or over) – either biological, adoptive or stepchildren. During the computer-assisted interview with the parent, background information, including frequency of contact and residential address, was first collected on all living offspring. Subsequently, two adult children were randomly selected (if the parent had more than two children), and additional questions (e.g. emotional closeness) were asked about the relationship with them. The parent and these two randomly selected children form the dyads under study, with the exception of 507 adult children who were living outside the Netherlands or were living in the same household as the parent. We also left out 29 parents for whom we had insufficient information about their children. As a result we had 2,554 parents and 4,601 parent-adult child ties in the analyses. Note that only 0.71% of the adult children in these dyads were adopted; we did not include this information in our analyses.

3.5.2   Measures

Dependent variable

Frequency of contact. We have information on contact frequency (visiting) between the parent and all children and we know the exact geographic location of the parent as well as that of 93% of the children. We used two types of measures for our dependent variable. First, to investigate differences among all dyads and networks we used a continuous measure: Contact frequency is expressed as the number of times an adult child and his/her parent met in the past 12 months. For convenience of interpretation of our results, we constructed a continuous measure by recoding the variable in the following way: Daily contact (300), a few times a week (156), weekly (52), monthly (12), a few times (4), once (1) and not at all (0) (Kalmijn, 2006). Secondly, to investigate differences within networks, we used a dichotomous measure: Whether (1) or not (0) the adult child in the dyad under study had fewer contacts with the parent than its network average.

Independent variables

Network characteristics. Size is the number of living siblings. *Gender composition* is (a) the number of sisters and (b) the number of brothers in the network. We will explore whether it is more informative to use overall network size or the two-gender composition measures instead. *Spacing* is the number of years between the births of siblings in a family, divided through the total number of spaces between siblings (= number of siblings minus 1). *Stepsiblings* is a dichotomous measure of whether (1) or not (0) there are stepsiblings in the network. *Geographic dispersion* is the average logged geographical distance between the homes of all siblings in a family. We inserted the maximum distance if a particular sibling lived abroad or if two siblings lived in two different countries outside the Netherlands (300 km.). We inserted the average distance between siblings (36 km.) if there was no address information on one sibling or if two siblings lived abroad but in the same country. *Cohesion* is a family-level measure using a scale of four items. An example is: 'The ties between members of my family are tightly knit' (Cronbach's α =.85). This information is obtained from the parent's supplemental self-completion questionnaire. The scores range from 0 (no cohesion) to 16 (strong cohesion).

   Position in the network. We have more detailed information (e.g. emotional distance, financial support) on the relationship between the parent and a maximum of two, randomly selected children. *Relative geographical distance* is based on a dichotomous measure. The score is (1) if any other adult child lives nearer to the parent than the adult child in the dyad under study and (0) if this is not the case. *Relative emotional distance* is also based on a dichotomous measure. The adult child is (1) or is not (0) emotionally more distant from the parent than the second randomly selected adult child. (As described, we only have information on emotional distance between the parent and a maximum of two, randomly selected children.) Emotional distance is assessed with the (reversed) measure for relationship

quality, scaled from 0 through 3, as an answer to the question: 'Taking everything together, how would you describe the relationship with your child: not great (3), reasonable (2), good (1), or very good (0)?' *Inequitable financial support* is whether the first randomly selected child did not (1) receive a large sum of money (> 500 Euros) in the past three months or regular financial support whereas the second randomly selected adult child did (0). Finally, the adult child may be the first-born (1) or not (0).

Dyadic controls. Gender was dichotomized as (1) mother/daughter and (0) father/son. The *age* of the parent was measured continuously; age squared controls for possible nonlinearity. The *health* of the parent is a dichotomous measure: (0) not restricted, (1) somewhat or severely restricted, based on self report. A dummy variable was constructed to distinguish whether the parent (1) ever *divorced* or (0) not, as divorce has been shown to be associated with lower levels of intergenerational contact in later life (Dykstra, 1998). *Geographical distance* was measured as the logged kilometers between the homes of the adult child and the parent. We controlled for the *emotional distance* within the dyad under study, and for whether the adult child had not (0) or had (1) received financial support.

3.5.3 Analysis

We first used OLS regression analysis to analyze the *continuous measure for contact frequency* within the dyads under study. Before doing so, we checked whether recoding the ordinal measure into a continuous one was a valid decision by conducting an ordered logistic regression model using the original coding: Recoding did not affect our main results (results can be obtained from the first author upon request). We then applied logistic regression analysis and estimated the likelihood that the adult child in the dyads under study had *less contact with the parent than the sibling network average*. As parent-child contact is more critical and differences in the network position between siblings might become more important if the parent is in greater need of support due to health problems, we also carried out both analyses for the dyads of parents reporting to be restricted due to health problems.

As we used a large-scale survey and concentrated our analysis on one or two randomly selected parent-child dyads per family network, we have a highly differentiated sample of dyads from a representative pool of families. In addition, our data have a hierarchical structure: some variables were measured at the level of each child and some at the level of the parent and sibling network. Because parent-child dyads within the same families cannot be treated as independent observations – as siblings share the same parent and the same sibling network – we used the *cluster* option in the Stata SE/9 statistical package to correct the biased standard errors (see, e.g., De Graaf & Fokkema, 2007). We also estimated multilevel latent variable models (using *gllamm* in Stata SE/9), but ultimately opted for the more straightforward analyses as the results were basically the same.

3.6   Results

3.6.1   Descriptive results

Table 3.1 gives a description of the dependent variables used in the analyses. The ordinal measure of annual face-to-face contact reveals that about 55% of the Dutch parents and randomly selected non-coresident adult children see each other at least once a week. This is a lower percentage than that found in other Dutch studies (e.g. Fokkema et al., 2003) where the adult child had not been selected randomly, but on the basis of importance (e.g. the geographically closest, the most supportive). The claim that we are using a more differentiated sample of dyads appears to be justified.

On average, adult children and parents have about 70 face-to-face contacts a year. In addition, adult children have a 32% likelihood of having fewer annual face-to-face contacts with their parents than the sibling network average.

Table 3.2 gives a description of the independent variables used in the analyses.

Network characteristics. The 2,554 parents studied had an average of 2.86 adult children; 1.42 sons and 1.44 daughters. The average spacing between siblings was 3.37 years. In 5% of the cases, at least one stepchild was present in the networks. Dutch adult siblings lived approximately 36 kilometers apart.

Position in the network. Forty-six percent of the adult children had at least one sibling living closer to the parental home; 10% had a greater emotional distance from the parent than the other randomly selected adult child; a majority (78%) of the parents rated the emotional bond with both children equally. One tenth of the adult children did *not,* whereas a brother or sister did receive a large sum of money in the past three months or regular payments; 45% of the adult children were first-born.

Dyadic controls. The gender of the parents and children were evenly distributed; 30% of the parents were somewhat or severally restricted due to health problems. About one fifth of the parents had ever separated or divorced. Dutch parents and children lived approximately 30 kilometers apart; on a scale from 0 to 3 the average emotional distance was 0.57. Of all adult children, 19% had received a large sum of money in the past three months or received regular payments.

3.6.2   Multivariate results

Contact Frequency

In Table 3.3 the results of the OLS regression estimating the frequency of annual face-to-face contact in the parent-child dyads are presented.

Table 3.1: Description Dependent of Variables (N = 2,554)

	M	Range
Frequency of annual face-to-face contact (ordinal)		
Daily	.07	0 – 1
A few times a week	.17	0 – 1
At least once a week	.30	0 – 1
At least once a month	.30	0 – 1
A few times	.12	0 – 1
Once	.01	0 – 1
Not at all	.03	0 – 1
Number of annual face-to-face contact (continuous)	69.27	0 – 300
Annual face-to-face contact less than network average (%)	.32	0 – 1

Note: Analyses based on weighted data and means are computed on a sample of one randomly selected adult child per parent.

Network characteristics. Model 1 supports hypothesis one, that additional siblings are associated with lower frequency of contact per dyad. However, Model 2 reveals that it is better to distinguish between numbers of brothers and sisters than to consider network size alone. The explanatory power lies in the number of sisters (H2). The more sisters, the lower the contact frequency per dyad. We continue with the full model (Model 3), that is including the network characteristics, the position in the network, controlled for dyadic constraints. Sibling spacing (H3) shows no significant difference. Having stepsiblings reduces the contact frequency by more than 15 annual contacts (H4). Furthermore, we can confirm that a higher average geographical distance (H5) between siblings decreases, whereas cohesion (H6) increases the annual frequency of contact per parent-child dyad.

Position in the network. We can only partly confirm the idea that relative attributes play a role in the frequency of contact in parent-child relationships. The relative distance separating the child and parent (H7) and financial support given to one child but not to the other (H9) do not make a difference in terms of contact frequency. The birth order of siblings has no explanatory power either (H10). Only a situation where an adult child is more emotionally distant relative to another randomly selected adult child is associated with a lower frequency of contact in the first dyad (H8). If in the same family one parent-child bond is stronger than another the number of annual face-to-face contacts is about 14 times higher in the former.

Table 3.2: Description of Independent Variables (N = 2,554)

	M	Range
Network characteristics		
Number of siblings	2.86	2 – 11
Number of brothers	1.42	0 – 9
Number of sisters	1.44	0 – 8
Spacing (Years)	3.37	0 – 28
Stepsibling(s) (Yes)	.05	0 – 1
Geographical dispersion (in km)[a]	35.88	0 – 300
Cohesion	10.81	0 – 16
Position in the network		
Relative geographical distance (Higher)	.46	0 – 1
Relative emotional distance (Higher)	.10	0 – 1
Inequitable financial support (Yes)	.05	0 – 1
First born (Yes)	.45	0 – 1
Dyadic controls		
Mother (Yes)	.49	0 – 1
Age parent (Years)	61.01	34-79
Parent restricted (Yes)	.30	0 – 1
Divorced (Yes)	.18	0 – 1
Daughter (Yes)	.51	0 – 1
Stepchild (Yes)	.01	0 – 1
Geographical distance parent-child (in Km)[a]	29.82	0 – 264
Emotional distance	.57	0 – 3
Financial support received by the child (No)	.81	0 – 1

Note: Analyses based on weighted data and means are computed on a sample of adult children.

[a]Zero km. if living in the same postal code area.

Table 3.3: OLS Regression Contact Frequency

Models	(1)	(2)	(3) Full model	(4) Parent restricted
Network characteristics				
Number of siblings	-2.33*	-	-	-
Number of brothers	-	-.83	-.91	-1.11
Number of sisters	-	-3.79**	-3.62**	-3.39*
Spacing (Years)	.77	.80	.79	.08
Stepsibling(s) (Yes)	-14.26**	-14.30**	-15.09**	-7.15
Geographical dispersion (logged)[a]	-2.56**	-2.50**	-2.41**	-1.84
Cohesion	1.54**	1.55**	1.56**	1.34
Position in the network				
Rel. geograph. distance (Higher)			-2.28	-2.97
Rel. emotional distance (Higher)			-13.63**	-12.35*
Inequitable financial supp. (Yes)			-6.96	1.53
First born (Yes)			-1.58	-1.03
Dyadic controls				
Mother (Yes)	3.57	3.58	3.89*	.87
Age parent (Years)	-4.66**	-4.69**	-4.54**	-5.58
Age parent (squared)	.03*	.03*	.03*	.03
Parent restricted (Yes)	6.17**	6.15**	6.09**	-
Divorced (Yes)	-15.09**	-15.20**	-14.85**	-14.62**
Daughter (Yes)	13.22**	16.18**	15.48**	18.61**
Stepchild (Yes)	-1.10	-1.22	.42	-
Geogr. dist. parent-child (logged)[a]	-26.32**	-26.36**	-26.01**	-27.61**
Emotional distance	-15.20**	-15.17**	-12.27**	-14.24**
Fin. supp. given in the past (No)	-8.32**	-8.27**	-7.84**	-12.80*
Constant	317.65***	316.93***	312.07***	364.07***
Observations	4,601	4,601	4,601	1,496
R-squared	*.31*	*.33*	*.35*	*.34*

Note: Standard errors are corrected for clustered observations within families.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

[a]Zero km. if living in the same postal code area.

Dyadic controls. In the controls we see that there is a positive association between parental health restrictions and parent-child contact frequency. Adult children see their parents more often if the latter are ill or handicapped, taking into account differences by age, parental divorce, geographical distance and so on. Daughters have considerably more contact with their parents than sons, and parental divorce is associated with a lower frequency of intergenerational contact. Note that we also estimated a model in which we controlled for a situation where a parent lived with a new partner (5% of all parents).This factor did not have an effect on contact frequency over and above parental divorce and having stepsiblings' (H4). Finally, greater emotional distance and the absence of financial support were associated with fewer annual contacts.

Parent restricted. Model 4 is the result of an analysis among the dyads of parents experiencing health problems. Given the small numbers, we did not control for whether the parent-child dyad was a step tie in this analysis. Of all the hypothesized effects, only the effect of the number of sisters (negative) and the relative emotional distance (negative) were found to be significant. The frequency of contact with a parent in poor health was lower if there was a larger number of sisters and/or a sibling who was emotionally closer to the parent. The controls show that contact is lower for ever-divorced parents, and for parents who are separated by larger geographical and emotional distances from their offspring. The controls also show that daughters interact with their parents considerably more often than sons. Interestingly, the effect of financial support was stronger if the parent needed more care.

Less Contact than Network Average

In Table 3.4 the results are presented of the logistic regression estimating the likelihood that the adult child has less contact with the parent than the sibling network average.

Network characteristics. As was the case in the former analysis, additional siblings are associated with a lower contact frequency per dyad. Every additional sibling was found to increase the likelihood (1.46) that single adult children see their parents less than average (H1). Both additional brothers and sisters had an effect, but sisters in the sibling network were associated with more differentiation among parent-child dyads than brothers (H2). Again, two measures give more explanatory information than just one measure for network size. Our further discussion of the results concerns the full model (Model 3). We did not find any evidence that the sibling age spacing had an effect on differences in parent-child contact within networks (H3). Earlier, we found strong effects of the presence of stepsiblings within the network on average parent-child contact, but it had no effect at all on differences among parent-child dyads within the same network (H4). Consistent with H5 greater geographical dispersion enhances the likelihood that an adult child has less contact with the parent than the sibling network average. Contrary to expectations (H6) greater cohesion also enhances the likelihood that an adult child has less contact with the parent than the sibling network average.

Table 3.4: Logistic Regression Contact Frequency: Less than Network Average (Odds ratio's)

Models	(1)	(2)	(3) Full model	(4) Parent restricted
Network characteristics				
Number of siblings	1.46***	-	-	-
Number of brothers	-	1.31**	1.21**	1.13
Number of sisters	-	1.63**	1.48**	1.34**
Spacing (Years)	1.01	1.01	1.03	1.04
Stepsibling(s) (Yes)	.86	.86	.89	.80
Geographical dispersion (logged)[a]	1.11**	1.10**	1.13**	1.11*
Cohesion	1.04**	1.04**	1.03*	1.02
Position in the network				
Rel. geograph. distance (Higher)			4.57**	4.26**
Rel. emotional distance (Higher)			2.98**	4.11**
Inequitable financial supp. (Yes)			1.37	1.60
First born (Yes)			1.12	1.20
Dyadic controls				
Mother (Yes)	1.13	1.13	1.05	1.06
Age parent (Years)	1.28**	1.29**	1.13*	1.14
Age parent (squared)	1.00**	1.00**	1.00*	1.00
Parent restricted (Yes)	1.09	1.10	1.06	-
Divorced (Yes)	.83*	.83*	.85	.83
Daughter (Yes)	.65**	.53**	.54**	.60**
Stepchild (Yes)	1.43	1.43	1.49	-
Geogr. dist. parent-child (logged)[a]	1.46*	1.47*	1.22*	1.30*
Emotional distance	1.58**	1.58**	1.35**	1.33**
Fin. supp. received by child (No)	1.59**	1.59**	1.50**	1.39*
Observations	4,601	4,601	4,601	1,496
Pseudo R-squared	*.13*	*.14*	*.23*	*.25*

Note: Standard errors are corrected for clustered observations within families.

* *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01.

[a]Zero km if living in the same postal code area.

If siblings live further apart, contact with the parent and more than one adult child appears to be harder to coordinate from a practical point of view. It is only a small effect, but we cannot explain why network cohesion would increase differences among parent-child dyads.

Position in the network. If one or more adult children live closer to the parent or if one of the siblings is emotionally closer to the parent than another child, this strongly increases the likelihood that the more distant child sees the parent less frequently than the network average (H7-8) by 4.57 and 2.98 times respectively. Giving financial support to one child but not to another enhances the likelihood of less than average contact (H9). Thus we find that factors that point at important differences between dyads (proximity, emotional and financial support) strongly determine differences in contact frequency among parent-child dyads within the same network. Again, birth order was found to have no effect at all (H10).

Dyadic controls. We found that parents and adult children see each other less often with increasing age. Here, we found that over the life course differences among parent-child ties increase, so parents are more likely to have more frequent contact with one child than with another as they age. Other factors that in principle affect all siblings alike (e.g. gender of parent; health of parent; parental divorce) do not increase differences among parent-child dyads within the same network. Finally, differences among siblings in terms of contact with the parent are likely to be greatest where the geographic dispersion or emotional distance are considerable, or if the adult child does/did not receive financial support.

Parent restricted. Model 4 is based on parents who reported that they were restricted due to health problems (again, we left out the stepchild control). We will focus on the most important results, namely the position in the sibling network. Children who are geographically and emotionally distant from their parents are 4.26 and 4.11 times more likely to have less contact with their parents than the average of all children. Furthermore, differences in financially supporting children increase the probability that differences occur among parent-child dyads regarding face-to-face contact. Sons are more likely to have few interactions with their restricted parents than daughters are.

3.7   Conclusion and discussion

Regular household help with personal care requires frequent face-to-face contact (Litwak, 1960). Most studies on contact analyze the most important parent-child dyad, that is, the relationship with the oldest, the one living closest to the parent, the most supportive or the emotionally closest adult child (Rogerson et al., 1993). To investigate more general patterns, we used a national representative sample of randomly selected parent-child dyads. Our first finding was that the average frequency of parent-child contact is lower – and more realistically describes parent-child dyads in general – than that found in previous studies in which selective samples were used.

A consistent conclusion in previous studies on intergenerational contact is that additional children reduce contact in single parent-child dyads (see, e.g., Lye, 1996). As a

result of socio-demographic developments, the relative importance of brothers or sisters in the lives of parents and children is gaining importance, a development that has been widely neglected by family scholars (McHale & Crouter, 2004). In this study, we used theoretical ideas from social network theory (Homans, 1958; Uehara, 1990; Widmer, 1999) and formulated hypotheses about the influence on parent-child contact of aggregate characteristics of the sibling network and about the position in the sibling network. We investigated (a) the frequency of contact among all dyads and we modeled (b) the likelihood that parent-child contact will differ among dyads within the same networks, controlling for dyadic characteristics that influence parent-child contact.

We were able to substantiate a straightforward exchange mechanism such as financial support given in the past. We also found evidence that the network in which siblings are embedded structures interactions with parents. First, we found that it is very informative to include two network size measures – number of sisters *and* number of brothers – instead of using only one. Having sisters was found to lower parent-child contact more than having brothers. Second, the presence of stepsiblings lowers contact in parent-child ties in later life. Third, both geographic network dispersion and network cohesion are important determinants of contact between parents and adult children. Geographical dispersion of the sibling network as well as the level of network cohesion are important network characteristics that predict the contact frequency per dyad. Our fourth finding confirms that expanding exchange arguments with network elements contributes importantly to explaining parent-child contact. If one adult child receives more financial support, or if he/she is geographically or emotionally closer to the parent than another, this has a negative effect on intergenerational contact with the latter child. Fifth, spacing and birth order have no effect at all on parent-child contact in adulthood. Sixth, investigating the special situation in which the parent is restricted due to health problems, the most important sibling network factors are differences between siblings in geographical and emotional distance towards their mutual parent and the leading role of daughters.

In general, we can conclude that the network perspective adds to our understanding of differences in the frequency of contact between parents and adult children. We could show that variation in network characteristics best predicts differences among dyads across family networks, whereas variation in the position in the same networks is able to predict contact differences within these networks. Besides individual restrictions like proximity and emotional distance, parent-child dyads are also influenced by the network. Individual family members take each other as a point of reference, as has been suggested in qualitative studies (Matthews, 2002; Matthews & Rosner, 1988).

A limitation of our study is the moderate response rate. Analyses of the representativity of the NKPS sample (Dykstra et al., 2005) revealed an underrepresentation of men, an underrepresentation of young adults, and an overrepresentation of women with children living at home. Residents of highly urban and highly rural areas are also

underrepresented in the sample, a pattern one often sees in survey research.

      Four suggestions for future research can be made. First, birth order or sibling spacing are not important factors influencing parent-child contact in adulthood, despite plausible predictions using the exchange perspective. It might be that more precise parental time investments in childhood are better predictors of contact in adulthood. Past parental favoritism or, for example, sibling rivalry in young age might have consequences for contact (and support) in later life (Feinberg, McHale, Crouter, & Cumsille, 2003; Rohde et al., 2003). Future research should focus more on developmental differences of siblings, dyadic problems, and the consequences for parent-child contact in adulthood. Third, more effort is needed to understand the consequences of repartnering and step ties for family relationships. Such research requires an oversampling of stepfamilies, yielding sample sizes like in US studies (e.g., Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000; Stewart, 2005). Fourth, an approach similar to the one adopted in this paper could be applied to investigate contacts within the complete personal network of kin and non-kin, like friends, colleagues and neighbors.

CHAPTER 4

PARENT-CHILD SOLIDARITY AND CONFLICT

4. PARENT-CHILD SOLIDARITY AND CONFLICT [9, 10]

4.1 Introduction

The life courses of children and parents can be described as co-biographies, implying high levels of interdependence (Hagestad, 2002). Bengtson (2001)predicts a larger significance of intergenerational bonds in the 21st century given the socio-demographic changes that have taken place in all Western societies. The number of years of shared lives between generations is greater than at any time in history given the increase in longevity. In addition, because of the drop in fertility rates, the number of within-generation ties has decreased relative to the number of across generation ties (Farkas & Hogan, 1995).

The nature of family relationships is also undergoing change. Under the influence of processes of individualization, family relationships are becoming more like achieved ties(Beck, 1986). The exchange of support is less often economically and normatively motivated and more often guided by affective and individual concerns (Lye, 1996). Commitment and support-giving are increasingly shaped by the quality of past interactions and are subject to continuous negotiations. Nevertheless, culturally prescribed notions about duties and obligations continue to play a role in family relationships. Striving to achieve a balance between normative expectations and personal goals and circumstances is a source of complexity in family interactions.

Family sociologists have become increasingly aware of the challenges of incorporating the complexity of intergenerational relationships in theory and empirical research. One of these challenges is to investigate family conflict as well as family solidarity (Bengtson et al., 1996). Along the same line, Connidis and McMullin (2002) argue there is a need to pay attention to intergenerational ambivalence, which they view as competing structurally patterned demands that are experienced by parents and their adult children in their interactions with one another. We take on the challenge and empirically investigate the push and pull in adult child-parent relationships.

4.2 Solidarity and conflict

Intergenerational solidarity and conflict have mostly been studied separately. In social research, there is a tendency to portray families either as places of peace, refuge, and harmony, or as places of abuse, anger, and violence (Bengtson et al., 1996). The underlying assumption is that family solidarity and conflict are each other's opposites on one continuum, ranging from high solidarity and low conflict to low solidarity and high conflict. The notion that solidarity and conflict are opposites ignores the common knowledge that, though family life is programmed for cooperation, love, mutual support, and happiness, there is also a high probability for family members to have conflicts (Sprey, 1969). According to classical sociological theory, the coexistence of harmony and strain is inevitable in close relationships such as family ties (Coser, 1956; Simmel, 1904).

We propose to examine the co-occurrence of solidarity and conflict. A first reason is that conflicts often arise in situations where solidarity is demonstrated. Caring for chronically ill older parents is an example (George, 1986). The unidirectional flow of rewards and resources can be a source of resentment and strain. Similarly, in the situation of coresiding adult children and their parents, conflicts are not uncommon (White & Rogers, 1997).

A second argument in favor of simultaneously considering solidarity and conflict is that both can have positive and negative implications. Though the positive effects on mental and physical health of supportive exchanges are well documented (House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988; Uchino, 2004), it has also been reported that solidarity can be "too much of a good thing" from the perspective of the beneficiary, or it can be "too much of a burden" from the perspective of the giver (Antonucci, Akiyama, & Lansford, 1998; Silverstein, Chen, & Heller, 1996). Moreover, it appears that negative interactions with adult offspring play a larger role than positive interactions in shaping the health and well-being of elderly parents (e.g., Krause & Rook, 2003). In an overview article, Lincoln (2000) concluded that negative interactions are potentially more harmful than social support is helpful. Unsurprisingly, severe conflict and social negativity in personal bonds have been shown to bring harm to a relationship (Bertera, 2005; Rook, 2003). Just as building up antibodies in the human body is a positive response to disease, however, the quality of relationships might be higher if at least some conflict occurs (Coser, 1956). Empirical evidence has indicated that conflict, in the sense of having disagreements and resolving them, can have a positive function and can improve relationship quality (Rook, 2001).

Two conclusions can be drawn from the previous considerations. First, we should avoid reducing problematic features of child-parent relationships to the absence of solidarity. As Bengtson and colleagues have argued previously, there might be four rather than just two solidarity-conflict combinations. Apart from high solidarity/low conflict and low solidarity/high conflict combinations, one should also find relationships that are characterized as intense ties (high solidarity and high conflict) and ties in which low solidarity coincides with the absence of conflict (Bengtson et al., 1996). Second, the joint analysis of solidarity

and conflict should help identify when these features have positive and when they have negative implications for relationship quality.

4.3   Ambivalence

Only recently, by applying the concept of sociological ambivalence (Merton & Barber, 1963; Smelser, 1998) to family ties, have efforts been made to step away from the simplistic idealization of kinship in which family members are assumed to maximize positive and minimize negative interactions. Ambivalence, as conceptualized by Connidis and McMullin (2002), emphasizes the tensions between social structure and individual lives as people attempt to meet their own, their family's, and society's contradictory demands and expectations. These authors view ambivalence as "structurally created contradictions that are made manifest in interaction" (2002, p. 565).

Ambivalence has been measured in two ways (Priester & Petty, 2001). One is to directly assess perceptions of ambivalence by asking respondents to what degree their feelings or attitudes toward the parent or child are mixed (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002). An alternative strategy is to capture ambivalence by separately measuring positive and negative feelings about the relationship (Fingerman, Hay, & Birditt, 2004; Willson, Shuey, & Elder, 2003). Both approaches focus on feelings and perceptions.

Our approach is different: We model ambivalence in terms of contrasting *behaviors* (solidarity and conflict) rather than in terms of feelings about these behaviors. We focus on behaviors because we view ambivalence as a characterization of relationships. To assess what kind of relationship exists between people, information is required about what they do together (Duck, 1983; Dykstra, 1990). Another reason for preferring a behavioral to a perceptual measure of ambivalence is that the latter might reflect the respondent's psychological state rather than inform us about relationship content. The focus on *contrasting* behaviors corresponds with Connidis and McMullin's (2002) view that ambivalence involves push-pull situations where children and parents are torn between demands, obligations, normative expectations, and time schedules. We measure this push-pull as high levels of both solidarity and conflict (the *intense* ties described by Bengtson et al., 1996).

Whereas Lüscher and Pillemer (1998) argue that intergenerational relationships are always characterized by ambivalence, Connidis and McMullin (2002) view ambivalence as one of a number of transitory states in which family relationships may find themselves. Depending on how contradictory demands and expectations are negotiated, relationships may be characterized by solidarity, conflict, or ongoing ambivalence. In line with this view, Fingerman et al. (2004) found that the majority of adult children (56%) experience the ties to their parents as solely close, one third (38%) experience them as ambivalent, and 6% experience them as solely problematic.

4.4 Multidimensionality

In the intergenerational solidarities model developed by Bengtson and colleagues (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Mangen, Bengtson, & Landry, 1988), six dimensions of solidarity were distinguished: affectual, consensual, functional, associational, structural, and normative solidarity. Unfortunately, these six dimensions have largely been examined in isolation of one another (e.g., Lawton et al., 1994; Roberts, Richards, & Bengtson, 1991). As a result, the nature of the associations among the different solidarity dimensions remains unclear. It is not unlikely that different associations emerge, depending on the motivations underlying interactions (Suitor, Pillemer, Keeton, & Robison, 1995). For example, if exchanges are duty driven, the provision of practical support need not be accompanied by emotional closeness. If however, affection is the motive, then high levels of practical support will go together with high levels of emotional support.

In the present study, we not only consider multiple solidarity dimensions (contact frequency; exchanges of financial, practical, and emotional support), but also multiple sources of conflict (conflicts over practical and personal issues). Drawing upon the work of Clarke, Preston, Raksin, and Bengtson (1999), we do not assume that children and parents who have conflicts in one area also have them in other areas. Similarly, we do not assume that the associations among different acts of solidarity are necessarily positive. Our analysis requires an empirical method that explicitly considers the multidimensional association between solidarity and conflict measures. We focus on the construction of a *typology* of child-parent relationships. Compared to a more conventional technique such as factor analysis, which is more concerned with the structure of variables (i.e., correlations), a typology focuses on the structure of cases (i.e., clusters of subtypes). Rather than rank ordering measures along separate underlying continua, a typology estimates a multivariate mixture of groups of cases (Hagenaars & Halman, 1989; Yamaguchi, 2000).

Typologies of intergenerational relationships have been modeled previously with U.S. data (Hogan, Eggebeen, & Clogg, 1993; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). Using data from the Netherlands, we expand on this work by including conflict. In addition, we consider child-parent relationships across the entire life course rather than restricting them to a certain life phase. Lastly, we include two modes of contact, namely face-to-face contact as well as communication by telephone, letters, and e-mail. Drawing upon the work of Bengtson et al. (1996) and that of Connidis and McMullin (2002), we expect to find four broad types of child-parent relationships: ambivalent (high levels of both solidarity and conflict), predominantly solidarily, predominantly conflicted, and detached (low levels of both solidarity and conflict). We expect that these broad types will be further differentiated by specific combinations of solidarity and conflict dimensions.

4.5   Research questions

The first research question we address is whether types of child-parent relationships can be empirically distinguished, and if so, what their incidence is. We do not view relationships as fixed into specific types. They change in response to changes in the lives of the parties involved, and are shaped over the course of ongoing negotiations. The second research question is whether the distinguished types of child-parent relationships vary by the gender and age of those involved, geographic distance, family size, and the parents' marital history. Earlier we argued that solidarity and conflict can have both positive and negative consequences. Our third research question addresses the outcome of solidarity-conflict combinations: Do the types of child-parent relationships differ in terms of relationship quality?

4.6   Socio-demographic predictors

Gender. The family as a social institution is often approached as women's problem area, irrelevant to men's trajectories (Krüger & Levy, 2001). Women are the kinkeepers: They are more likely to specialize in and feel responsible for personal contact, emotional support, information flow, domestic maintenance, and organizing ritual occasions (Rosenthal, 1985). Following these considerations, we predict that women are more likely to be part of a predominantly solidarily relationship than are men.

Women more often find themselves in contradictory roles than men. They have fewer opportunities for personal development than men, for example in education and employment (Walby, 1990), although they are expected to be successful on the labor market as well as to keep up their kinkeeping skills and to care for spouses and elderly parents (Willson et al., 2003). The bond between daughters and mothers is the most intense tie within families, with mothers reporting higher emotional closeness and more tension in the relationship with daughters compared to that with sons (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002). We expect that women are more likely to have ambivalent ties than are men.

Age. The interdependencies between children and parents are structured by biographical time (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Settersten 2005). During the establishment phase of early adulthood, in which the child is pursuing education, entering the labor force, acquiring the first home, and starting a family, the child generally depends on parental support (Gulbrandsen & Langsether, 2000). A difference in views between children and parents regarding whether children owe their parents respect or about whether received support should be repaid can be the source of conflicts. In old age, there is often an inherent tension between the declining authority of parents as they struggle with decreasing independence and the growing authority of children over parents' lives (George, 1986). Following the preceding arguments, we expect to see high probabilities of conflict and ambivalence in child-parent relationships when the children are young adults and when they are in advanced middle age.

Geographic distance. Studies on intergenerational exchange of support tend to consider geographic distance as an opportunity for exchange (e.g., De Jong-Gierveld, 1998). Relatively low exchange costs, that is, living nearer, increase the exchange rate. High exchange rates mean there are more situations of interdependence in which exchange partners can have conflicts (Coser, 1956). We expect that geographic distance decreases the likelihood that a dyad is characterized by solidarity, ambivalence, or conflict and increases the likelihood that a dyad is characterized by detachment.

Family size. Child-parent contacts are less frequent in large than in small families (e.g., Spitze & Logan, 1991), first because children can share responsibilities toward their parents with siblings, and second because parents must divide their time and energy over a greater number of offspring. We expect to find an inverse relationship between family size and the likelihood that a child-parent dyad is characterized by solidarity. It is unclear what kind of an association to expect between family size and the likelihood of experiencing conflict. One argument is that in a larger family there are more goods and services to give and to gain and consequently that the probability for conflict and ambivalence increases. An alternative argument is that siblings can help to canalize tensions through reasoning or social control, so conflict and ambivalence will be less common.

Parents' marital history. Parental divorce increases the risk of having broken, weakened, or disrupted family ties (Dykstra, 1998; Fischer, 2004; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998). We expect more ambivalence, conflict, and detachment if parents divorced than if they remained together. On the one hand, widowhood tends to bring the generations together. On the other hand, increasing levels of contact and support exchange might engender more conflicts between adult children and parents if the latter are widowed than if they are still together.

4.7   Method

4.7.1   Data

The data are from the public release file of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, a large-scale survey on the nature and strength of family ties in the Netherlands (Dykstra et al., 2005). Between 2002 and 2004, computer assisted personal interviews were held with over 8,161 men and women aged 18 to 79 who form a random sample of adults residing in private households in the Netherlands. Approximately 5% of respondents were non-native Dutch, meaning that both parents were born outside the Netherlands. The response rate was 45%, which is comparable to that of other large-scale family surveys in the Netherlands (see Dykstra et al., 2005). In the present study, with the exception of the multivariate analyses, the data were weighted to make them better representative of the Dutch population aged 18 - 79.

The data set has 8,579 reports on the relationship with a surviving biological parent. When respondents reported that they had had no contact with a parent in the past 12 months,

no questions were asked about support exchanges or conflict. By necessity, we excluded the data from these respondents, thereby reducing our sample size by 219 (2.5%), to 8,360 child-parent dyads. Most (85%) of respondents who had not been in touch with their parents in the past year rated their relationship with them as *not very good*, which is the lowest score on a scale of 4. We also excluded the data from 501 adult children (5.8%) who were living in the same household as their parents to avoid having patterns of interaction, contact frequency, and support exchange confounded with coresidence. The remaining 7,859 dyads consist of 4,990 adult children, of whom 2,869 reported on two and 2,121 on one parent. In the former case we selected one child-parent dyad per family randomly, to avoid within-family dependencies, leaving us with 4,990 child-parent dyads.

4.7.2 Measures

Latent Class Analysis (LCA) was applied to construct the typology of child-parent relationships (see the next section for details). The input for LCA is a cross-classification table of the scores for each variable in the analysis. It is customary to use dichotomous variables (cf. Hogan *et al.*, 1993; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). Though dichotomization implies a loss of information, it ensures having a manageable number of cells in the data matrix. An analysis on the basis of eight dichotomous measures, for example, results in 2^8 or 256 cells. Using all answer categories would produce unacceptably sparse data.

The following *solidarity* measures were used. The frequency of face-to-face contact and of contact via telephone, e-mail, and letters in the past 12 months were assessed separately. We constructed two variables: monthly face-to-face contact and monthly contact otherwise with 1 = *yes,* and 0 = *no*. We had two financial support measures: whether the child had given valuable items or a substantial sum of money to the parent in the past 12 months, and vice versa. The answer categories were 1 = *yes,* and 0 = *no*. Two variables for the exchange of practical support were used: whether the child had helped the parent with chores in and around the house, lending things, transportation, and moving things in the past three months, and vice versa. The answer categories were dichotomized as 1 = *once or twice/several times*, and (0) *not at all*. Finally, we had two measures for emotional support: whether the adult child had shown an interest in the personal life of the parent in the past three months, and vice versa. The answer categories were dichotomized as 1 = *once or twice/several times*, and 0 = *not at all*.

To assess *conflict*, the question was asked: "Have you had any conflicts, strains or disagreements with [the target parent] in the past 3 months?" A maximum of five conflict topics could be listed: money, practical matters, norms/values, politics, and the relationship itself. Five dichotomous measures were constructed for each conflict topic, with 1 = *once or twice/several times*, and 0 = *not at all*.

The following set of *sociodemographic characteristics* was included in the analyses. Gender of the child and parent were coded as 1 = *male* and 1 = *female*. Three dummy

variables were used for the age of the child: *18 - 30*, *31 - 50*, and *51 and over*. Geographic distance was measured in kilometers and determined on the basis of the postal codes of the children's and parents' addresses. In the Netherlands, postal codes refer to small geographic locations (e.g., 10 houses on a particular street). To avoid heteroskedasticity, geographic distance was logged. Family size was the number of the child's living siblings. Three dummy variables were used for parents' marital history: *married*, *divorced or separated*, and *widowed*.

The outcome measure *relationship quality* ranged from 1 = *not great* to 4 = *very good*. The question in the interview was: "Taking everything together, how would you describe your relation with [target parent]?"

4.7.3   Analyses

In LCA, one assumes probabilistic rather than deterministic relationships between the latent construct (the concept of interest, in this case the co-occurrence of solidarity and conflict) and manifest indicators (the measures actually used) (Hagenaars & Halman, 1989). A basic assumption of LCA is conditional dependence, which means that associations between manifest indicators exist only insofar they measure the same latent construct. LCA has the advantage that the classes of the latent construct are discrete and need not be ordered along a continuum (Clogg, 1995). In this study, the classes are typical scoring patterns for the solidarity and conflict measures.

We started by computing a latent class model with only a single latent class (no relation between manifest indicators) and added one class after the other, checking for model fit and significance. We used the program Latent GOLD 4.0, developed by Vermunt and Magidson (2005). We tested the model with CONDEP, a program for diagnosing the assumption of conditional dependence in latent class models (Uebersax, 2000).
Finally, we determined the robustness of the latent class model regarding gender and age by estimating separate latent class models for child-father, child-mother, son-father, son-mother, daughter-father, and daughter-mother dyads, and for dyads distinguished by the adult children's age (age 18 - 30, 31 - 50, and 51 and over).

To examine the associations between socio-demographic characteristics and child-parent relationship type, we applied multinomial logit regression analysis (Liao, 1994), which is an extension of the binary logit model. The multinomial logit model (MNLM) is appropriate because the categories of the dependent variable (i.e., types of child-parent relationships) are discrete, nominal, and unordered. With *n* categories, the MNLM is roughly equivalent to performing 2 * (*n* - 1) binary logistic regressions. In the MNLM, all the logits are estimated simultaneously, which enforces the logical associations among the parameters and makes a more efficient use of the data (Long, 1997). To interpret the MNLM results, we estimated marginal effects (Liao, 1994).

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of the Child-Parent Relationships (N = 4,990)

	M	Range
Dyads by gender		
Son-father	.15	0 – 1
Son-mother	.25	0 – 1
Daughter-father	.22	0 – 1
Daughter-mother	.38	0 – 1
Age group child		
18 – 30	.21	0 – 1
31 – 50	.63	0 – 1
51 – 79	.16	0 – 1
Geographic distance (km)	45.78	0 – 278.83[a]
Marital history parent		
Married	.51	0 – 1
Divorced or separated	.13	0 – 1
Widowed	.36	0 – 1
Family size	2.70	0 – 17
Relationship quality	3.17	1 – 4

Note: Analyses based on weighted data.
[a]Zero km for parents and children living in the same postal code area.

The marginal effect gives the change in probability by one unit change in an explanatory variable when all other variables are held constant at sample mean values. For example, the marginal effect for a dummy variable is the difference between being in Category 1 and being in Category 0. Per variable the marginal effects sum to 0. Finally, we used an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model to estimate the differences in relationship quality by type of child-parent relationship.

4.8 Results

4.8.1 Descriptive analyses
Descriptive information on the child-parent dyads in the sample is presented in Table 4.1. As the table shows, the dyads are unevenly distributed by gender: There are relatively few son-

father ties and relatively many daughter-mother ties. Adult children aged 31 - 50 form the largest group of respondents. The oldest dyad is composed of a 79-year-old son and a 103-year-old mother. The mean distance separating children and parents is 46 kilometers. The average number of siblings is 2.7. Approximately half of the adult children have parents with an intact marriage; 13% experienced parental divorce. The perceived relationship quality is relatively positive: a mean of 3.17 on a scale of 1 - 4.

Table 4.2 provides information on solidarity and conflict. Four out of five adult children see their parents once a month or more often. The same proportion is in contact by telephone, e-mail, or letters at least once a month or more often. Children are less likely to give financial support to their parents than to receive it from them. The reverse pattern is found for the exchange of practical help. Emotional support is exchanged in the majority (around 90%) of child-parent relationships. Conflicts are relatively infrequent, and when they occur they are most often about practical matters and about norms and values.

4.8.2 Typology of child-parent relationships

We reduced the number of measures in the LCA for reasons of manageability. First, we dropped financial support given to the parent because this is very rare. Second, we subsumed emotional support given and received under one measure of emotional support exchanged (1 = *yes*). Third, we collapsed conflicts about money and about practical things into a measure of conflicts over material issues (1 = *yes*), and we collapsed conflicts about norms/values, politics, and the relationship itself into a measure of conflicts over personal issues (1 = *yes*).

Table 4.3 shows the results of the LCA. Though we had expected to find four types of child-parent relationships, the optimal number turned out to be five (see Table A.1 in Appendix A for details on model fit). Conditional dependence diagnostics showed that the assumption of local dependence holds for the five-type solution.

When separate latent class models for subgroups of child-parent dyads varying by gender composition and age were estimated, the same general typology emerged, indicating that it is highly robust across all the distinguished subgroups of child-parent relationships.

As can be seen in the top row of Table 4.3, 40% of child-parent dyads are of the first type, 29% are of the second, 16% of the third, 11% of the fourth, and 4% are of the fifth type. These percentages are the cumulative probabilities of all child-parent dyads of belonging to the respective types. The coefficients in the columns of Types 1 to 5 indicate the probability that a dyad is characterized by specific dimensions of solidarity and conflict, under the condition that the dyad is of that type. For example, there is a 97% probability of at least monthly face-to-face contact in Type 1 child-parent dyads, and a 7% probability of having conflicts about personal issues.

Table 4.2: Solidarity and Conflict Items: Descriptive Statistics (%) (N = 4,990)

Solidarity	Few times or less	Monthly	Weekly or more
Annual face to face contact	18	49	33
Annual contact otherwise	21	41	38
	No	Yes	
Financial support given to parent	95	5	
Financial support received from parent	81	19	
	Not at all	Once or twice	Several times
Practical help given to parent	37	33	30
Practical help received from parent	60	23	17
Emotional support given to parent	07	23	70
Emotional support received from parent	11	22	66
Conflict			
Money	97	2	1
Practical matters	90	7	3
Norms/values	92	6	2
Politics	97	2	1
Relationship itself	93	5	2

Note: Analyses based on weighted data.

The likelihood of at least monthly face-to-face contact broadly distinguishes the first three dyad types from the last two: It is high for Types 1, 2, and 3, and low for Types 4 and 5. A high probability of emotional support exchange is characteristic of both Types 1 and 2. Though the probability of exchanging practical support is generally on the high side for both types, it is higher for Type 2 than for Type 1. The likelihood that adult children receive financial support from their parents is higher for Type 2 than for any other type.

The characteristics of Type 2 relationships, with their high probability of support and conflict, match those of the *ambivalent* type we had expected to find. The characteristics of Type 1 relationships do not fully match those of the predominantly solidarily type we had expected to find. Though the probability of emotional support exchange is highest for this type, the probability of exchanging practical and financial support is not. Given the low likelihood of conflict for Type 1 relationships, we assign them the label *harmonious*.

Table 4.3: Latent Class Analysis of Child-Parent Relationships (Probabilities) (N = 4,990)

	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5
%	40	29	16	11	4
Solidarity					
At least monthly contact face to face	.97**	.95**	.96**	.03	.02
At least monthly contact otherwise	.89**	.89**	.49**	.79**	.09
Practical help given[a]	.66**	.87**	.52**	.20**	.09**
Financial support received[a]	.16**	.31**	.09**	.18**	.04
Practical help received[a]	.49**	.57**	.19**	.07*	.01
Emotional support exchanged	.99**	.94**	.55**	.92**	.10
Conflict					
Material issues	.01**	.25**	.07**	.04**	.05*
Personal issues	.07*	.21**	.11**	.10**	.18**

Note: Analyses based on weighted data.

[a]Viewed from the perspective of the adult child.

*p < .01. **p < .001.

Though Type 3 shares a relatively high probability of at least monthly face-to-face contact with Types 1 and 2, the likelihood of exchanging practical, financial, and emotional support, and the likelihood of conflict are neither high nor low. Intermediateness on all dimensions with the exception of the probability of monthly face-to-face contact is distinctive for this type. For that reason, we use the label *obligatory* to describe Type 3 dyads.

Apart from a low probability of at least monthly face-to-face contact, Types 4 and 5 are characterized by low probabilities of exchanging practical and financial support. The probability of conflict over personal issues is a distinguishing feature: relatively low for Type 4 and relatively high for Type 5. Both types have a low probability of conflict over material issues. The probability of emotional support exchanges is another distinguishing feature: relatively high for Type 4 and relatively low for Type 5. Neither type has the characteristics of the hypothesized detached type (low support, low conflict) or of the hypothesized predominantly conflicted type. Given the relatively high probability of emotional support exchange and of monthly contact by telephone, letter, and e-mail, we assign the label *affective* to Type 4 ties. Given the low likelihood of contact and exchange of support, and the relatively high likelihood of conflict over personal issues, we assign the label *discordant* to Type 5 dyads.

By using dichotomized measures of conflict, one cannot differentiate a child-parent relationship in which there is one minor strain in a three-month period from one in which there is frequent and ongoing conflict. In separate analyses (results obtainable from the first author upon request), we explored the effect of using the full range of the answer categories. The structure of the resulting typology was similar, but not easily interpretable. We also

explored the effect of using the original five conflict measures. Results showed that they clustered into the dimensions we had distinguished (conflicts over material and over personal issues). In our view, the use of the full range of measures provided no added value.

4.8.3   Socio-demographic characteristics

Table 4.4 shows the associations between relationship type and a set of socio-demographic characteristics. As the table shows, the distribution of relationship types varies by gender of the participants. Relationships with mothers are more likely to be harmonious than are those with fathers, a finding that is consistent with the notion of mothers as kinkeepers. As predicted, daughters are more likely than sons to be part of ambivalent ties. Table 4.4 shows furthermore that sons and fathers are more likely than daughters and mothers to be part of obligatory ties. This finding suggests that men's intergenerational ties are more often characterized by frequent contact with moderate rather than high levels of support exchange than are women's.

The distribution of relationship types also varies by age. Though we had predicted a U-shaped association, the data show that the likelihood of being part of an ambivalent relationship decreases linearly with age.

This finding suggests that the push-pull that is characteristic of ambivalent relationships declines as children reach middle adulthood and beyond. The likelihood of being part of an obligatory tie is greatest when children have passed beyond middle age and parents have reached the last phase of their life. Insofar as child-parent relationships exist where "just keeping in touch" rather than intensive support exchange is the norm as is the case in obligatory ties, they are most prevalent at advanced ages. Table 4.4 also shows that being part of an affective tie is less likely in young adulthood than when children have passed beyond middle age. Taken together, the findings on age differences suggest that children disengage from and become less involved with their parents as they move from young adulthood to middle age and beyond.

The distribution of relationship types by geographic distance is consistent with expectations. Geographic distance decreases the likelihood of being in relationships with a high probability of monthly face-to-face contact (harmonious, ambivalent, and obligatory ties), and increases the likelihood of being in relationships with a low probability of face-to-face contact (affective and discordant ties).

Family size also turns out to be a significant predictor of relationship type, and largely along the lines we had expected. Consistent with the notion that support exchanges are more dispersed in larger families, we find that family size is positively associated with the likelihood of being part of an obligatory tie, and negatively associated with the likelihood of being part of an ambivalent tie. Table 4 also shows that children in larger families are more likely to be part of discordant ties, suggesting that in the event of conflict, interactions decrease to a minimum, presumably because responsibilities can be more easily deferred.

Table 4.4: Socio-demographic Predictors of the Five Types of Child-Parent Relationships:
Marginal Effects of Multinomial Logistic Regression (N = 4,990)

	Harmonious	Ambivalent	Obligatory	Affective	Discordant
Child's gender[a]	-.05	-.02*	.05*	.01	.00
Parent's gender[a]	-.08*	-.01	.07*	.01	.02
Age child between 18 - 30[b]	-.00	.18**	-.12**	-.05*	-.01
Age child between 31 - 50[b]	.06	.06*	-.11**	-.00	-.00
Geographic distance (log)	-.07**	-.03**	-.06**	.08**	.01**
Child's number of siblings	-.01	-.03**	.02**	.00	.01**
Parents divorced[c]	-.13**	.03	-.03	.06*	.07**
Parent widowed[c]	-.07	.05**	-.00	.01	.01

[a]0 = *female*, 1 = *male*. [b]Reference category = *Age child between 51 - 79*. [c]Reference category = *Parents married*.

*$p < .01$. **$p < .001$.

Consistent with the expectation that parental divorce increases the likelihood of separation in families, we find a negative association between divorce and the likelihood of being part of a harmonious tie, and a positive association between divorce and the likelihood of being part of a discordant tie. We had contrasting expectations regarding the effect of widowhood on child-parent relationships. As Table 4.4 shows, parental widowhood increases the likelihood of being part of an ambivalent tie. Apparently, widowhood introduces strains into the relationship with adult children.

Table 4.5: Differences in Relationship Quality by Type of Child-Parent Relationship
(OLS regression, N = 4,990)

	ß
Ambivalence[a]	-.22**
Obligatory[a]	-.53**
Affective[a]	-.51**
Discordant[a]	-1.86**
Constant	3.43**
R^2	0.21

[a]Reference category = *Harmonious*.

*$p < .01$. **$p < .001$.

4.8.4 Relationship quality

Differences in relationship quality between the five types of relationships are shown in Table 4.5. Harmonious child-parent relationships are rated most positively, followed by ambivalent ties. Obligatory and affective parent-type relationships receive moderate quality ratings. The

quality ratings of these two types do not differ. The quality of discordant child-parent relationships is rated the most negatively by far.

4.9   Conclusion and discussion

Our study shows that child-parent relationships cannot be placed along a continuum where solidarity implies the absence of conflict and vice versa. Neither can they be grouped according to perpendicular axes denoted by high and low levels of solidarity and conflict. Our results suggest a more complex configuration of child-parent relationships: The distinguished solidarily behaviors are not always exhibited simultaneously, just as the likelihood of having conflicts in one area does not imply the likelihood of having them in other areas.

Different dimensions and combinations of solidarity and conflict are the discriminating features of the five types of child-parent relationships that emerged in our analyses. Children and parents in harmonious relationships are likely to see each other frequently and to exchange emotional support. Children and parents in obligatory relationships are also likely to see each other frequently, but the likelihood of exchanging financial, practical, and emotional support is only moderate. They are more likely to experience conflict over material and personal issues than those in harmonious relationships. The interactions of children and parents in ambivalent relationships have a high likelihood of being characterized by all dimensions of solidarity and conflict. Children and parents in affective relationships are unlikely to see each other and to exchange practical support, but are likely to exchange emotional support. The likelihood of conflict over material issues is low in these relationships, whereas there is a moderate likelihood of experiencing conflict over personal issues. Finally, children and parents in discordant relationships are unlikely to interact or to exchange any kind of support. The likelihood of conflict over material issues is relatively low, but the likelihood of conflict over personal issues is high in these relationships.

The relationship typology provides a nuanced picture of factors contributing to quality in child-parent relationships. Harmonious relationships, which resemble those with friends, are rated most positively overall. Ambivalent relationships, which have the highest likelihood of conflict but also the highest likelihood of exchanges of financial and practical support, receive the next most positive rating. Clearly, conflict in child-parent relationships should not be equated with poor quality. Obligatory and affective relationships receive moderate quality ratings. Though children and parents in obligatory ties are likely to see each other frequently, they are not necessarily close. The findings on affective relationships suggest that, in the absence of other meaningful exchanges, a high likelihood of emotional support is not sufficient for relationships to be regarded as good. Discordant relationships have extremely poor quality ratings. In these relationships, interactions are likely to be infrequent and support exchanges are likely to be nonexistent. Here we have conditions where conflict is associated with poor relationship quality.

With our use of a behavioral measure, our assessment of ambivalence differs from

previous approaches. The findings show that ambivalence is not a general characteristic of child-parent relationships as some scholars have suggested (e.g., Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998), but is manifested in one type. In this type, a high likelihood of exchanging financial and practical support is associated with a high likelihood of having conflicts over material and personal issues. Our results suggest that ambivalence is most prevalent when structural conditions offer fewer *escape* options (Smelser, 1998), such as when there are fewer options to defer responsibilities to other family members (living nearby, small number of siblings, widowed parents), difficulties acting against normative obligations to care (daughters, cf. Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Willson et al., 2003), and dependence on parental assistance (young adulthood).

It is interesting to compare our results to those of Silverstein and Bengtson (1997) who analyzed a U.S. sample of adult children who reported on the relationships with their surviving parents. Their measures were not identical to ours but sufficiently similar. Silverstein and Bengtson did not differentiate between face-to-face contact and contact by telephone, e-mail, or letter, did not include items on financial support or on conflict, included an item on similarity of opinions, and geographic distance was incorporated in the typology itself. Five relationship types also emerged in their analyses. Our harmonious type resembles their sociable type, our obligatory type resembles theirs, and our affective type resembles their intimate but distant type. Insofar as only exchanges of support are considered, our ambivalent type resembles their tight-knit relationships (highest likelihood of exchange), and our discordant type resembles their detached relationships (lowest likelihood of exchange).

The consideration of conflict brings additional insights. Our analysis reveals that children and parents who exchange high levels of support, particularly financial and practical support, are most prone to conflict. Whereas Silverstein and Bengtson describe child-parent relationships with high levels of exchange as 'the most cohesive group' (p. 445), our findings point to ambivalence in these relationships. Our analyses reveal furthermore that children and parents who are not notably involved in any exchange of support are also prone to conflicts, disagreements about personal issues in particular. Whereas Silverstein and Bengtson speak about a lack of engagement, our findings suggest predominantly negative engagement.

The Silverstein and Bengtson (1997) sample is virtually identical to ours in terms of the focus on non-coresident ties, the age range, and the proportion of female respondents. The proportion with divorced or separated parents is higher in the U.S. sample (19% vs. 13%), as is the proportion non-White (12% vs. 5%). These differences are not surprising, given that the U.S. has a higher divorce rate and a longer history of migration. The U.S. is a larger and less densely populated country, so it is not unreasonable to assume larger geographic distances separating children and parents. In our view, these cross-national differences are unlikely to have implications for the typology of child-parent relationships (a similar dimensional structural should emerge in the U.S.), but the frequency distribution of types is likely to differ. The higher U.S. divorce rate implies a lower proportion of harmonious ties, for example,

whereas the greater geographic distances imply a higher proportion of affective ties.

The relatively low response rate is a limitation of our study. Analyses of the representativeness of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study sample (Dykstra et al., 2005) reveal an under-representation of single men and of men in couple households, an under-representation of young adults, and an over-representation of women with children living at home. Residents of highly urban and highly rural areas are also under-represented in the sample, a pattern that one often sees in survey research. We see little cause to think the typology of child-parent relationships is affected by the selective response, just as we feel cross-national differences are unlikely to have implications. The robustness of the typology across age groups and gender composition of the dyads provides ground for this view. It is reasonable to assume, however, that selectivity affects the distribution of relationship types (e.g., an underestimation of the proportion of ambivalent ties given the under-representation of young adults in the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study sample).

The typology characterizes child-parent relationships as they exist at a particular point in time. It provides only a snapshot of the interactions in which children and parents engage. Such a frozen image does not do justice to the dynamics in their lives. Relationships change over time as the participants enter new phases of life, as their circumstances and the circumstances of those who are dear to them change, and as the participants attempt to manage to conflicts, imbalances, and insecurities. In our view, future research efforts should be directed at studying shifts in the typology over time. Questions to be addressed involve the frequency of change in child-parent relationship type, and the explanation of why some dyads change from one type to another.

4.10 Appendix

Table 4.A: *Model Fit for the Optimal Number of Classes in the LCA (N=4,990)*

Number	Df[a]	L[2b]	p-value	BIC[c]
1	247	2296.9	.00	202.8
2	238	661.6	.00	-1356.2
3	229	431.4	.00	-1510.1
4	220	333.5	.00	-1531.6
5	*211*	*226.7*	*.22*	*-1562.2*
6	202	194.1	.64	-1518.5

[a]*Df* = Degrees of freedom. [b]*L²* = Likelihood ratio statistic.
[c]*BIC* = Bayesian Information

CHAPTER 5

WHERE IS THE EXIT?
PARENT-CHILD AMBIVALENCE AND
RELATIONSHIP QUALITY
IN HIGH CONTACT TIES

5. WHERE IS THE EXIT? PARENT-CHILD AMBIVALENCE AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY IN HIGH CONTACT TIES [11] [12]

5.1 Introduction

Although family life is programmed for positive interactions – cooperation, love, mutual support, and happiness – the probability of negative interactions is also high (Sprey, 1969). It is surprising, though, that in previous research on intergenerational relationships, the focus has been either on solidarity or conflict. Moreover, different features of solidarity (Komter & Vollebergh, 2002; Lawton et al., 1994; Rossi & Rossi, 1990) and conflict (Clarke et al., 1999) have mostly been examined in isolation of one another. Recently, the solidarity/conflict model – simultaneously investigating both – has become one of the most important research challenges in studying the complexities of adult child-parent bonds (Bengtson et al., 1996; Katz et al., 2004; Van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2006).

In this study, we expand on this challenge by questioning the common idea that solidarity always has positive, whereas conflict has negative implications for relationship quality. This has been proven not to be true in all cases. For instance, it has been shown that under certain conditions solidarity can have negative implications for individuals or relationships (Lincoln, Taylor, & Chatters, 2003; Silverstein et al., 1996). Furthermore, in addition to causing damage to the relationship, conflict can also be a constructive element in close relationships (Coser, 1956; Simmel, 1904). A certain balance between pushes and pulls, between positive and negative interactions, probably relates to the highest relationship quality (Rook, 2001). In order to unravel this 'certain balance', and to understand why some ties are of a poor quality, whereas others represent strong bonds, we propose to combine the solidarity/conflict model with the concept of intergenerational ambivalence (Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry, & Silverstein, 2002).

5.2 Positive and negative ambivalence

Research on ambivalence has increased the understanding of the co-occurrence of positive

and negative interactions in parent-child bonds (Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998; Pillemer & Lüscher, 2004). In most studies, ambivalence is regarded as having mixed feelings about the relationship. Interestingly, in almost all studies on intergenerational ambivalence, it is assumed but not empirically investigated, that ambivalence is associated with problems and poor relationship quality. (Fingerman et al., 2004; Lang, 2004; Willson et al., 2003). In our conceptualization of ambivalence, we take into account what parents and children actually *do*. We consider the co-occurrence of solidarity and conflict as a behavioral manifestation of intergenerational ambivalence (Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2006). Moreover, we think that some ambivalent ties can be associated with high, and others with poor relationship quality.

Studies on ambivalence tend to either focus on specific age groups such as frail parents (Lang, 2004; Spitze & Gallant, 2004; Willson et al., 2003), specific ties such as ties between coresidents (White & Rogers, 1997), mother-child bonds (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002), or specific events, such as when young adults come out gay or lesbian (Cohler, 2004). Moreover, sample sizes tend to be small. We think that the focus on small, specific samples prevents us from understanding why some develop high quality ties, whereas others develop poor quality ambivalent relationships. Therefore, we use a large, representative sample.

Our research question is: *Which conditions increase the likelihood that intergenerational ambivalence is associated with high, rather than poor relationship quality?*

We consider *negative ambivalent relationships* as ties in which solidarity and conflict are combined with poor relationship quality. *Positive ambivalent relationships* are ties, in which solidarity and conflict are combined with high relationship quality.

5.3 High contact ties

Face-to-face contact is an important condition for the co-occurrence of pushes and pulls between parents and their adult children. There are two reasons for this. First, relationships between individuals are maintained and cemented by actual interaction (Dykstra, 1990, p. 82); as Duck (1983, p. 102) argued: 'the activities *are* the relationship, and require the work, time, effort, attention, and skills of the partners'. Second, both elements of the relationship largely depend on having face-to-face contact, such as providing support (Mangen et al., 1988) and the occurrence of practical disputes and irritations (Clarke et al., 1999). The chance that relationships between family members are characterized by ambivalence can assumed to be higher when they regularly see each other.

To test theoretical arguments to predict poor instead of high quality ambivalent ties, we choose to focus on adult children who report a relatively high face-to-face contact frequency with their parents, i.e. children who see their parents at least on a weekly basis. These high contact ties conceivably show enough variation in the impact they have on relationship quality. Part of these parent-child ties probably remain, despite weekly visits,

socially and emotionally distant; there might even not be much support exchange. Other ties are likely to be characterized by less distance. It is our aim to discover why.

5.4   Exit options

The main reason to distinguish between positive and negative ambivalent relationships is the following: We assume that ambivalence, the co-occurrence of solidarity and conflict, will relate to a poorer relationship quality, if the interactions between parents and adult children are not so much the result of free decision making, but rather of a lack of exit options (Komter, 2001; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Smelser, 1998). In general, we expect a higher probability of a negative ambivalent relationship if the adult child has fewer exit options.

We will formulate hypotheses about the probability of a *negative*, instead of a *positive ambivalent relationship* in connection with the adult child's exit options. We argue that the child's exit options are a function of the (1) personal ability to see exits, (2) the availability of exits, (3) the normative barriers against exits, and (4) the relative need for exits.

5.5   Hypotheses

H1: We expect a higher probability of a negative ambivalent relationship with a decreasing personal ability to see exits. People who lack assertiveness are more likely to feel trapped in a given situation than are those who have little difficulty standing up for themselves and making important decisions in their lives (Sincoff, 1990). Less assertive adult children are less able to negotiate intimate connections with others. Such individuals have fewer options to exit, manage or reshape their relationships with others.

H2: We expect a higher probability of a negative ambivalent relationship with a decreasing availability of exits. Alternative contacts are important determinants for parent-child contact and support (e.g., Hogan et al., 1993). If the child is socially isolated, that is, if the child has a less satisfying social network, he or she is more dependent on the bond with the parent, and has fewer exit options from the relationship. So in general, the absence of available exits increases the probability of a negative ambivalent relationship.

H3: We expect a higher probability of a negative ambivalent relationship with stronger normative barriers against exits. People differ in the extent to which they feel responsible for contributing to the well-being of family members (Finch, 1989; Pyke, 1999). Perceived family obligations reduce the exit options from relationships in which the demands are too much or the interactions not constructive. Following this reasoning, we expect a higher probability of a negative ambivalent relationship if the child's normative barriers against exits, that is, the pressure to invest in family ties, are stronger.

H4: We expect a higher probability of a negative ambivalent relationship with an increasing need for exits. One aspect that may affect the relative need for exit options is family size. Adult children in large families experience fewer parental demands than in smaller ones (Dykstra & Knipscheer, 1995; Uhlenberg & Cooney, 1990). Firstly, parents must

divide their time and energy over a larger number of offspring, and secondly, children can share responsibilities toward their parents with siblings. Therefore, having more siblings means having more exit options. Another aspect may be geographic distance. Living nearer to the parents might enhance the opportunity to exchange support and reduce potential strains associated with parental care giving, because less travel time is needed (McCulloch, 1995; Tomassini et al., 2003; White & Rogers, 1997). One would expect negative ambivalent relationships, when high contact frequency must be managed from a greater distance. However, one might also argue that exit options are limited when the homes of the parent and the child are only separated by a short geographic distance: in that case one can less easily 'escape' having contact.

5.6 Method

5.6.1 Data

The data are from the public release file of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS), a large-scale survey on the nature and strength of family ties in the Netherlands (Dykstra et al., 2005). Between 2002 and 2004 computer assisted personal interviews were held with over 8,150 men and women aged 18 to 79 who form a random sample of adults residing in private households in the Netherlands. Approximately five percent of respondents were non-native Dutch, meaning that both parents were born outside the Netherlands. The response rate was 45 per cent which is comparable to that of other large-scale family surveys in the Netherlands (see Dykstra et al., 2005). In the present study, the data were weighted to make them better representative of the Dutch population aged 18 - 79 (with the exception of the multivariate analyses). We restricted the analysis to the 2,694 adult children who had face-to-face contact at least weekly with their parents; these are 51% of all parent-child dyads in the NKPS. If both parents met the criterion of weekly contact, one was selected randomly for incorporation in the analysis. The response rate of the adult child's supplemental self-completion questionnaire was 92 per cent.

5.6.2 Analysis

Latent Class Analysis (LCA) is a technique that lends itself to the analysis of response patterns such as the co-occurrence of solidaristic behaviors and conflict. In LCA one assumes probabilistic rather than deterministic relationships between the latent construct and manifest indicators (the measures actually used) (Hagenaars & Halman, 1989). One basic principle of LCA is local independence, which means that associations between manifest indicators exist only insofar they measure the same latent construct. In the present analysis the latent construct is the co-occurrence of solidarity and conflict. LCA has the advantage that the categories of the latent construct are discrete and need not be ordered along a continuum (Clogg, 1995).

Each dyad has a probability set of belonging to the identified latent classes depending on its response pattern. We use the program Latent GOLD 4.0, developed by Vermunt and Magidson (2005).

To investigate the conditions that increase the likelihood of one class over the other, we applied multinomial logit regression analysis (Liao, 1994), which is an extension of the binary logit model. The multinomial logit model (MNLM) is appropriate because the categories of the dependent variable (i.e. types of child-parent relationships) are discrete, nominal and unordered. With n categories, the MNLM is roughly equivalent to performing 2 * (n - 1) binary logistic regressions. In the MNLM all the logits are estimated simultaneously, which enforces the logical associations among the parameters and makes a more efficient use of the data (Long, 1997). To interpret the MNLM results, we estimated marginal effects (Bartus, 2005; Liao, 1994). The marginal effect gives the change in probability by one unit change in an explanatory variable when all other variables are held constant at sample mean values. For example, the marginal effect for a dummy variable is the difference between being in Category 1 and being in Category 0. Per variable the marginal effects sum up to zero.

In the analyses focusing on positive versus negative ambivalence, logistic regression was applied. Whereas MNLM is appropriate for analyses involving a range of parent-child types, logistic regression is appropriate in analyses where contrasts between two specific parent-child types are the focus of attention.

Analyzing ambivalence, Fingerman, Hay, and Birditt (2004), and Willson, Shuey, and Elder (2003) found that daughters experience more ambivalence than do sons. Compared to men, women have fewer options not to act in accordance with normative obligations to care for family members (Connidis & McMullin, 2002). For example, female adult children of frail parents might feel obligated to support, and at the same time feel strained by such responsibility (Lang, 2004). Elderly parents might be caught between the wish to be autonomous, and the reality of being dependent on children (George, 1986; Spitze & Gallant, 2004). Given these considerations, we conducted separate logistic regression analyses for daughters and sons, as well as for different age groups of the adult children (between 18-35, 36-55, and 56-79).

5.6.3 Measures
Solidarity, conflict, and relationship quality
The input for LCA is a cross-classification table of the scores for each variable in the analysis. It is customary to use dichotomous variables (cf. Hogan *et al.*, 1993; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). Though dichotomization implies a loss of information, it ensures having a manageable number of cells in the data matrix. An analysis on the basis of eight dichotomous measures, for example, results in 2^8 or 256 cells. Using all answer categories would produce unacceptably sparse data.

The following *solidarity* measures were used. Four variables for the exchange (received and given) of housework – such as preparing meals, cleaning, fetching groceries, doing the laundry – and practical matters – such as chores in and around the house, lending things, transportation, moving things – were used. The answer categories were dichotomized in (1) once or twice/several times and (0) not at all. To assess *conflict*, the question was asked: 'Have you had any conflicts, strains or disagreements with [the target parent] in the past 3 months?' Answer categories were not at all, once/twice, and several times. Two dichotomous measures were constructed for conflicts over personal issues and conflicts over material issues, with (1) once, twice or several times and (0) not at all. *Relationship quality* was an ordinal measure of the adult child's overall evaluation of the relationship with the parent, scaled from 0 through 3, as an answer to the question: 'Taking everything together, how would you describe the relation with your child/father/mother: not great (0), reasonable (1), good (2), or very good (3)?'

Exit options

(1) The *personal ability* to see exits is measured by an assertiveness scale of 4 items from 0 through 16, for example, 'I stand up for myself', 'I can cope with anything' (α =.82), obtained from the child's written questionnaire (missings set to the mean).

(2) The *decreasing availability* of exits relates to the extent of social isolation, measured by the loneliness scale, developed by De Jong-Gierveld and Kamphuis (1985). Six negatively formulated items express feelings of desolation and of missing an attachment relationship. An example of such an item is 'I often feel rejected'. Five positively formulated items express a sense of belonging. For example, 'There are plenty of people I can lean on when I have problems'. The positive items were reverse coded. Scale scores range from (0) not socially isolated to (11) extremely socially isolated (α =.84).

(3) The *normative barriers* against exits are measured by a scale for perceived family obligations. This measure is a seven-item scale, with scores ranging from 0 through 28. Examples of scale items are: 'Children should look after their sick parents', and 'Parents should support their children if they need it' (α =.80). A higher score indicates stronger views that family members should look after one another when necessary.

(4) The *relative need* for exits is measured by (a) the number of siblings and (b) geographic distance, which are continuous variables. Geographic distance is measured in kilometers and determined on the basis of the postal codes of the child's and parents' addresses. In the Netherlands postal codes refer to relatively small spatial units (e.g., the first ten houses on one side of a street).To avoid heteroskedasticity, geographic distance was logged (cf. Silverstein, 1995).

Controls

We control for factors that generally influence relationship quality in adult parent-child ties in general. *Marital history parent.* Parental divorce has often been found to be associated with poor quality family relationships (Fischer, 2004; Hansagi et al., 2000). Dummy-variables were constructed to distinguish whether the parent had an intact marriage, had remarried, or was living alone. *Parental conflict during childhood.* It has been shown that children, who have experienced much negative events during childhood, have less rewarding relationships with their parents in adulthood than others (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998). The measure we used is a scale of 0 through 10 (α =.78), based on five questions on parental tensions and conflicts during childhood, from 'How often did your parents have heated discussions?' to 'How often did your parents live apart for a while?' Answer categories were (0) never, (1) once or twice, and (2) frequently. *Family cohesion.* The more cohesive the family as a group, the higher the quality of its relationships (Hechter, 1987; Homans, 1958). This measure is a scale of four items from 0 through 16, for example, 'The ties between members of my extended family are tightly knit' (cronbach's α =.85).

We control for a number of other socio-demographic characteristics of the adult child. *Partner status* of the child is dichotomized in (1) whether or (0) not the adult child has a partner. We also control the *parental status*: the child (1) has children or (0) not. *Imputed measures due to non-response written questionnaire.* In case of non-response, we imputed the means of the measures for assertiveness, social isolation, perceived family obligations, and social cohesion. To check for systematic bias, whether not fully cooperating with the family survey can be associated with poor relationship quality, we controlled for the eight per cent non-response for the self-completion questionnaire.

5.7 Results

5.7.1 Descriptive analyses

Descriptive information on the parent-child dyads in the sample (high contact ties) is presented in Table 5.1. As the first table shows, the dyads are unevenly distributed by gender: There are relatively few sons (43 per cent) and fathers (33 per cent). The average number of siblings is 2.58. The mean distance separating children and parents is almost 11 kilometers. The adult children in our sample are on the average 38 years old. More than half of the adult children have parents with an intact marriage.

Table 5.2 provides information on contact, solidarity, conflict, and relationship quality. Within the high contact group, 55 per cent of the adult children see their parents once a week; 11 per cent have contact on a daily basis. Children are more likely to give practical support (housework and odd jobs) to their parents than to receive it from them. Conflicts are relatively infrequent and the perceived relationship quality is relatively positive: 90 per cent rates the relationship 'good' or 'very good'.

Table 5.1: Description of the Sample (N = 2,694)

	M	SD	Range
Exit options			
Assertiveness	11.87	2.29	0 – 16
Social isolation	2.35	2.55	0 – 11
Family obligations	14.86	4.26	0 – 28
Number of siblings	2.58	2.09	0 – 17
Geographic distance (Km)	10.93	26.09	0 – 224[a]
Male	.43		0 – 1
Reporting on father	.33		0 – 1
Age 18 – 35	.42		0 – 1
Age 36 – 55	.49		0 – 1
Age 56 – 79	.09		0 – 1
Parental marriage intact	.57		0 – 1
Parent repartnered	.03		0 – 1
Parent lives alone	.43		0 – 1
Parental conflict	1.90	2.00	0 – 10
Family cohesion	11.10	2.83	0 – 16
Partnered	.84		0 – 1
Parent	.18		0 – 1
Imputed due to non-response self-completion question.	.08		0 – 1

Note: Based on weighted data.
[a]0 for ties living in same postal code area.

In general, the characteristics of high contact ties are comparable to those of the complete sample of parent-child relationships. We only mention the main differences. In the main sample, the mean age of the adult children (46 years) and the geographical distance (38 km.) are significantly higher. Furthermore, in the complete sample a lower proportion of parents (33%) are in intact marriages (a higher proportion are widowed). Main sample adult children generally show higher levels of social isolation (2.92) and lower levels of family cohesion (10.5).

A lower proportion (70%) of children in the main sample have a partner. Finally, a higher proportion (over 20%) rates the relationship with their parent as 'not great' or 'reasonable'. It is not surprising to find some positive selectivity in our group of high contact ties regarding intactness of partner relationships, family cohesion, and relationship quality. Nevertheless, we believe the high-contact sample is heterogeneous enough to distinguish positive from negative ambivalent ties.

Table 5.2: Contact, Solidarity, Conflict, and Relationship Quality: Descriptive Statistics (Percentages) (N = 2,694) [a]

	Once a week	Few times a week	Daily	
Face-to-face contact\	55	34	11	
Solidarity	Not at all	Once or twice	Several times	
Help housework given	47	24	29	
Help odd jobs given	32	35	33	
Help housework received	70	15	15	
Help odd jobs received	58	23	19	
Conflict				
Material issues	85	12	3	
Personal issues	86	11	3	
	Not great	Reasonable	Good	Very good
Relationship quality	2	8	42	48

Note: Based on weighted data.

[a]Viewed from the perspective of the adult child

5.7.2 Typology of parent-child relationships

Table 5.3 shows the results of the LCA. The optimal number of parent-child relationship types turned out to be four (see Table A.1 in Appendix A for details on model fit). As can be seen in the top row of Table 5.3, 33% of parent-child dyads are of the first type, 32% are of the second, 24% of the third, and 11% are of the fourth type.

These percentages are the cumulative probabilities of all parent-child dyads of belonging to the respective types. The coefficients in the columns of types 1 to 5 indicate the probability that a dyad is characterized by specific dimensions of solidarity, conflict, and relationship quality, under the condition that the dyad is of that type. For example, there is a 68% probability that the child supports the parent with housework in Type 2 parent-child dyads, and a 10% probability of having conflicts about personal issues.

A first conclusion is that analyzing solidarity and conflict simultaneously among high contact ties reveals a nuanced picture of intergenerational relationships: Not all parents and children who meet often exchange much support, have no conflict, and have high quality relationships. The Type 1 relationships can be denoted as *close-distant ties*: High contact frequency is combined with a relatively low level of solidarity and almost no conflict. This type of relationship can be characterized as one where children and parents regularly spend time together on an obligatory basis, just as socially or emotionally distant friends.

Table 5.3: Latent Class Analysis of Parent-Child Relationships (Probabilities)
(N = 2,694)

	Type 1 Close-Distant	Type 2 Positive Balanced Ambivalent (PBA)	Type 3 Positive Dependent Ambivalent (PDA)	Type 4 Negative Ambivalent (NA)
%	33	32	24	11
Solidarity				
Help housework given	1	68	99	47
Help odd jobs given	41	67	88	61
Help housework received	13	65	11	16
Help odd jobs received	34	82	06	35
Conflict				
Material issues	2	12	11	28
Personal issues	3	10	9	50
Relationship quality				
Not great	0	0	0	9
Reasonable	5	1	4	39
Good	50	30	48	47
Very good	45	69	47	5

Note: Based on weighted data.

The probability of exchanging practical support (housework and odd jobs) and conflict is generally on the high side for Type 2, Type 3, and Type 4. In almost 67 per cent of all ties between parents and adult children, who meet at least on a weekly basis, solidarity and at least average conflict go together. However, Type 2 shows high probabilities for support in both directions. Both Type 3 and 4 show a high probability of support mainly towards the parent, although the probability of support in Type 3 is much higher. Another important distinction is the probability of conflict: low for Type 2 and Type 3, and high for Type 4. Finally, relationship quality helps to distinguish the 3 types: The probability for the best relationship quality is highest in Type 2, followed by Type 3 and Type 4. Given the differences, we assign the label *positive balanced ambivalent (PBA)* to Type 2. In the Type 3 ties, the parent is the main beneficiary and is dependent on the adult child. We assign the label *positive dependent ambivalent (PDA)*. Finally, given the relatively low probability of support exchange and high probability for conflict and poor relationship quality, we assign the label *negative ambivalent* (NA) to Type 4 ties. This confirms our claim that ambivalence can have positive and negative

implications. Moreover, ambivalence generally has positive implications, contrary to what is suggested in most work on intergenerational ambivalence.

5.7.3 Characteristics of the four types of parent-child relationships

Table 5.4 shows the results of the MNLM with the use of marginal effects, which reveal the relative importance of the independent variables in distinguishing different types of high contact parent-child relationships. Of the exit options, only social isolation and family size turn out to be distinguishing features. Socially isolated children are less likely to be part of positive balanced ambivalent ties, and more likely to be part of negative ambivalent ties. Those from larger families are more likely to be part of close-distant and positive dependent ambivalent ties, and less likely to be part of positive balanced ambivalent ties. Table 5.4 also shows that the four types of parent-child relationships are patterned by gender and age. Sons are more likely to be in close-distant ties, and less likely to be in positive balanced ambivalent ties. Young adults are more likely to be in positive balanced ambivalent ties, but less likely to be in positive dependent ambivalent ties. The opposite holds for adult children who have passed middle age.

The partner status of parents and children are additional distinguishing features. Adult children whose parents have remarried are less likely to be in positive dependent ambivalent ties. For adult children with parents who are in an intact marriage, the likelihood of being in close-distant or positive balanced ambivalent ties is greater, but the likelihood of being in positive dependent ambivalent or negative ambivalent ties is smaller. Partnered adult children are less likely to be in positive balanced ambivalent ties. Having experienced parental conflict while young, is another distinguishing feature: the likelihood of being in close-distant or positive dependent ties is smaller, but the likelihood of being in negative-ambivalent ties is greater.

Adult children who describe their families as cohesive, are more likely to be in positive balanced ambivalent and positive dependent ambivalent ties, and less likely to be in negative ambivalent ties. Finally, those who failed to return the self-completion questionnaire are not evenly distributed across relationship types. They are most likely to be in negative ambivalent ties.

Our research questions focus on ambivalent relationships. The close-distant ties are not characterized by ambivalence (given the virtual absence of conflict), and therefore we do not include these relationships in subsequent analyses. We think our hypotheses on exit options can best be tested, if we compare the negative ambivalent (NA) with the positive balanced ambivalent (PBA) and positive ambivalent (PDA) relationships respectively. This is what we did in the following two logistic regression analyses.

Table 5.4: Characteristics of the Four Types of Parent-Child Relationships: Marginal Effects of Multinomial Logistic Regression (N = 2,694; Pseudo R^2 = .15)^a

	Close-Distant	Positive Balanced Amb. (PBA)	Positive Dependent Amb.(PDA)	Negative Ambivalent (NA)
Assertiveness	-.00	.00	.00	-.00
Social isolation	.00	-.02**	-.00	.01**
Family obligations	-.01*	.00	.00	-.00
Number of siblings	.03**	-.03**	.02**	-.00
Geographic distance (Km)	.02*	-.01	.01	-.00
Male	.12**	-.11**	.01	-.02
Reporting on father	.06	-.05	-.04	.03
Age 18 – 35 Years old (Ref: 36-55)	.04	.16**	-.20**	.00
Age 56 – 79 Years old (Ref: 36-55)	.06	-.25**	.15*	.03
Parental marriage intact (Ref: Lives al.)	.10*	.07*	-.12**	-.04*
Parent repartnered (Ref: Lives alone)	.13	.04	-.14**	-.02
Parental conflict	-.02*	-.00	-.03**	.01**
Family cohesion	.00	.01*	.01**	-.01**
Partnered	.04	-.06*	.03	-.00
Parent	.05	-.03	-.03	.01
Non-response self-completion quest.	-.02	-.04	.00	.06*

* *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01.

^{a}The coefficients for each variables do not always sum up to 0 due to rounding errors.

5.7.4   Negative ambivalent versus positive balanced ambivalent

In Table 5.5, we present the results of the comparison of the negative ambivalent (NA) with the positive balanced ambivalent (PBA). We estimated the full model, and also did so separately by gender. We did not estimate the separate models by life phase, because the numbers in the oldest age group were too small.

Assertiveness, as indicator of the ability to see exit options does not seem to be important for ending up in either a PDA or NA relationship. As Table 5.5 shows, there is an effect of the decreasing availability of exits: Socially isolated adult children, especially daughters, are more likely to be in a negative ambivalent tie. Family obligations, as indicator of normative barriers, decrease rather than increase the likelihood of a NA instead of a PBA relationship. An alternative explanation may be that in high contact ties, family obligations form no *barrier* but rather a *buffer* for regular pushes and pulls in intense family relationships.

Table 5. 5: Negative (NA) versus Positive Balanced Ambivalent (PBA) Relationships by Gender and Life Phase: Logistic Regression Analysis (Odds ratio's)

	Full model	Sons	Daughters
Assertiveness	.97	.96	.96
Social isolation	1.14**	1.07	1.17**
Family obligations	.95*	.94	.95
Number of siblings	1.08	1.12	1.06
Geographic distance (Km)	.97	.93	.98
Male	1.23	-	-
Reporting on father	2.16**	4.59**	1.76
Age 18 – 35 Years old (Ref: 36-55)	.53**	.53	.51**
Age 56 – 79 Years old (Ref: 36-55)	10.39**	4.99	14.56**
Parental marriage intact (Ref: Lives al.)	.45**	.18**	.61
Parent repartnered (Ref: Lives alone)	.64	.11	1.03
Parental conflict	1.19**	1.20**	1.18**
Family cohesion	.85**	.88*	.84**
Partnered	1.10	1.33	.99
Parent	1.34	1.87	1.13
Imp. due to non-response self-compl. quest.	2.13**	1.53	2.36**
N	1,090	319	771
Pseudo R^2	.19	.22	.20

* p < .05; ** p < .01.

Finally, the relative need for exits (the number of siblings or geographic distance) does not play a role in distinguishing PBA from NA ambivalent ties. We do find interesting gender differences though.

As Table 5.5 shows, there is a much higher likelihood to have a negative ambivalent bond with fathers than with mothers. Moreover, father/son dyads show the highest likelihood, compared to mother/son bonds. Father/daughter relationships are almost twice as likely to be negatively ambivalent, compared to mother/daughter bonds. This finding does not seem to converge with the claim that women have the most intense bond of all parent-child relationships (Pillemer & Lüscher, 2004; Willson et al., 2003), and therefore are at risk of having strained relationships. However, the claim does seem to be confirmed if life phase is taken into account: Among daughters NA instead of PBA is much more likely with increasing age than among sons. This finding is consistent with the idea that if caring becomes heaviest and least rewarding – in case the elderly parents must depend on support – women in midlife pay the highest price in the sense of relationship strains (George, 1986; Greenfield & Marks, 2006; Lang, 2004; Rosenthal, 1985).

Table 5.6: Negative (NA) versus Positive Dependent Ambivalent (PDA) Relationships by Gender and Life Phase: Logistic Regression Analysis (Odds ratio's)

	Full model	Sons	Daughters	Child 18-35	Child 36-55	Child 56-79
Assertiveness	.96	.99	.95	.91	.97	1.04
Social isolation	1.08*	1.07	1.09*	1.11	1.08	1.08
Family obligations	.96*	.95	.96	.98	.96	.96
Number of siblings	.87**	.91	.86**	.98	.84**	.88
Geogr. dist. (Km)	.93	.90	.94	.99	.96	.84
Male	.79			.52	.93	.32*
Reporting on father	1.58	3.41**	1.05	3.13*	1.59	.20
18–35 (Ref: 36-55)	3.49**	2.78**	3.99**			
56–79 (Ref: 36-55)	.72	.45	.86			
Parental conflict	1.28**	1.35**	1.25**	1.28**	1.28**	1.38*
Family cohesion	.86**	.88*	.85**	.79**	.86**	.84
N	922	344	578	198	562	146
Pseudo R^2	.19	.21	.19	.22	.14	.20

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Note: Findings controlled for partner and parental status, marital history parent, imputed due to non-response self-completion questionnaire (none if them were significant)

5.7.5 Negative ambivalent versus positive dependent ambivalent

In Table 5.6, we present the results of the comparison of the negative ambivalent (NA) with the positive dependent ambivalent (PDA). We estimated the full model, and again did so separately by gender and life phase. We only report the results of the hypothesized effects and of the control variables that were statistically significant.

Again, assertiveness does not affect the likelihood of a negative ambivalent relationship. The availability of exits does, however: More socially isolated adult children, especially daughters, find themselves more often in a negative ambivalent tie. Again, contrary to our expectations, family obligations prevent high contact ties from ending up in negative ambivalent relationships. Of the relative need for exits, only the number of siblings has an effect on distinguishing between PDA and NA ambivalent ties: Having more siblings is conducive to having ambivalent relationships in which the parent is more dependent on support, especially among middle aged daughters. Again, we find interesting gender and age differences.

Like in the NA/PBA comparison, NA instead of PDA is much more likely in the relationship between fathers and sons than in any other gender combination. The life phase is also important but in an opposite direction: NA instead of PDA ties are much more likely

among young adult children and their parents, than among the old. In the 'non normal expectable' (Neugarten, 1969) situation, where a father is highly dependent on a young adult child (aged 18-35), the odds are high (3.49) that the quality of the ambivalent tie is poor. An explanation is that young children often are not prepared nor very eager to support their parents (yet) (Cancian & Oliker, 2000; Connidis & McMullin, 2002). Though daughters may be better prepared for the role as kinkeeper, in later life they have a three times higher likelihood to be in a negative, instead of a positive dependent ambivalent tie than sons (.32).

5.8 Conclusion and discussion

Simultaneously investigating solidarity and conflict has become an important research challenge in studying the complexities of adult child-parent bonds (Bengtson et al., 1996; Katz et al., 2004; Van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2006). Our study combines the solidarity/conflict model with the concept of intergenerational ambivalence and classic sociological ideas on cohesion in close ties (Simmel, 1904; Coser 1956). We challenge the common idea that the implications for relationships quality of solidarity are always positive, whereas those of conflict are always negative. We used representative data of adult children and parents with high levels of contact (weekly or more; N=2,694), since most theoretical progress can be expected by analyzing solidarity, conflict, and relationship quality in 'active' relationships.

Three conclusions can be drawn. First, among the high contact ties, ambivalence is not always perceived negatively but is more often perceived as something positive. In positive ambivalent relationships, conflict has a normal (i.e., average) level. This finding confirms the idea that both solidarity (e.g. Bengtson et al, 2002) and conflict (e.g. Simmel, 1904) are bonding elements within parent-child ties. If we want to improve our knowledge on why some parent-child relationships are cohesive and satisfying ('pure', like in Giddens (1991)), whereas others are stressful (e.g. George, 1986), solidarity and conflict have to be studied simultaneously in our view (cf. Bengtson et al, 1996).

Second, about one tenth of the Dutch parents and children who at least meet on a weekly basis have negative ambivalent relationships: They support each other, simultaneously have conflicts, and poor relationship quality. This nuances Homans' (1958) idea that ties always become stronger, if partners have more contact and exchange more support.

A third conclusion is that reduced exit options contribute to negative ambivalence in close relationships (Smelser, 1998). Those who are socially isolated and thus have few exit options via alternative relationships are more likely to end up in negative ambivalent ties. Furthermore, having a smaller number of siblings also increases the likelihood of being part of negative ambivalent ties. Not all our indicators of exit options showed the expected effects on negative ambivalence, however. Assertiveness, as an indicator of the personal ability to see exit options did not play a role. Neither did geographic proximity. Contrary to expectations, those with strong family obligations were more likely to be part of positive ambivalent relationships rather than negative ambivalent relationships. Apparently, adhering to the view

that family members should support one another does not operate as a barrier against exiting, but rather should be seen as a buffer against intense pushes and pulls in high contact family relationships. Here we have a confirmation of theoretical suggestions on the bonding impact of norms in family relationships (Coleman, 1990; Hechter, 1987).

Distinctions by age and gender gave interesting insights into the nature of intergenerational ambivalence, since they support *and* modify earlier findings. They also corroborate our initial idea that we should distinguish between positive and negative ambivalent ties. Young adults are more likely to be in a positive balanced ambivalent tie, whereas older adult children are more likely to be in a positive dependent ambivalent tie, caring for their ageing parents. Our results confirm Connidis and McMullin's (2002) claim about the more difficult position of caring daughters in families, as they are more likely to find themselves in negative ambivalent relationships, especially if the parent is rather old. In contrast to findings from earlier research we did not find the greatest negativity in mothers' relationships (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002). In all life phases fathers are much more likely to find themselves in negative ambivalent relationships. Men's role has largely been neglected in research on intergenerational ambivalence and needs more attention.

That it makes sense to distinguish between positive/negative ambivalence becomes apparent in our finding that the likelihood of negative, instead of positive ambivalent ties increases if exchange patterns do not coincide with the 'normal expectable' state of interdependence between parents and adult children (cf. Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Hagestad, 2002). A 'non normal expectable' situation emerges, if middle aged daughters receive relatively much support from their elderly parent: Daughters are not only more likely to have relationships of a poor relationship quality than sons who are in a dependent position, but this likelihood is much higher in the balanced situation. Another 'non normal expectable' state of interdependence is the situation, in which parents (especially fathers) must rely on their young adult children's (especially their sons') support. This means that if parent-child relationships are atypical or deviate from social prescriptions, the likelihood is much higher that the 'certain balance' in the ambivalent tie is disturbed. Poor relationship quality is often the result.

Our results imply a challenge for social policy makers to better take into consideration the possibility that care giving can lead to psychological distress for the beneficiary (Morée, 2005). In addition, the public debate on the balance between formal and informal care, should put more emphasis on the position of ageing men and caring sons. Ageing parents may want to be more independent from their children than ever: They expect less support in old age than their own children report to be willing to give in case of need (Van Gaalen, 2005). Socio-demographic developments increase the likelihood that parents do not have daughters but must rely on (maybe less competent) sons.

Future work should capture more on variation in the dependency structure between parents and children, for instance by including more detailed information on the heath status of the aging parent. In addition, scholars should try to incorporate characteristics of the sibling

network, because sibling-parent relationships are highly interdependent. Finally, the typology described here characterizes child-parent relationships as they exist at a particular point in time. Although our life phase perspective revealed some of the dynamics, future research efforts should be directed at studying shifts in the typology over time. For example, it is of high interest to understand under which conditions relationships shift between positive and negative ambivalent ties.

5.9   Appendix

Table 5.A: *Model Fit for the Optimal Number of Classes in the LCA (N = 2,694)*

Number	Df^a	L^{2b}	p-value	BIC^c
1	9	1213.83	.00	-722.33
2	17	842.82	.00	-1030.37
3	25	446.64	.00	-1363.59
4	*33*	*305.33*	*.00*	*-1441.94*
5	41	251.10	.04	-1433.20

[a]*Df* = Degrees of freedom. [b]*L²* = Likelihood ratio statistic.
[c]*BIC* = Bayesian Information

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

6.   CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

6.1   Introduction

In this dissertation, new challenges for intergenerational family relationship research were formulated and empirically investigated. We have focused on major socio-demographic and socio-cultural developments that have induced changes in Western family life. These were changes in the *structure* of families and changes in the *nature* of intergenerational family ties. Changes in family structure are (a) the emergence and (b) presumed decline of the nuclear family, (c) increasing family heterogeneity, and (d) the increasing significance of intergenerational bonds. Significant changes in the nature of intergenerational family ties are: (a) the decreasing need for mutual dependency structures in the shift from obligatory to more chosen parent-child ties, (b) the growing emphasis on emotions and relationship quality, accompanied by (c) increasing complexities and the rising importance of negotiation within parent-child ties.

The first challenge was to place the emergence and presumed decline of the nuclear family in the context of long-term developments. We did this by analyzing the dynamics of the living arrangements in which children grew up in the Netherlands between 1850 and 2000. The second research challenge was to highlight the role of the sibling network in the relationship between adult children and their parents. The third challenge was to improve our understanding of the nature of contemporary parent-child ties by simultaneously investigating solidarity and conflict. The fourth challenge was to understand why some parent-child ties are cohesive and stable whereas others are ambiguous and stressful.

Analyses were done with data from The Historical Sample of the Netherlands (HSN) (Mandemakers, 2001) (challenge 1) and The Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) (Dykstra et al., 2000; 2005) (challenges 1 to 4). The HSN is a national database with information on the complete life history of a 0.5 percent random sample (76,700 birth records) of men and women born in the Netherlands between 1812 and 1922. This data set gave us the opportunity to depict long-term changes in the living arrangements of the Dutch population across cohorts and statuses. The NKPS includes a face-to-face survey conducted among a random sample of more than 8,000 individuals within private households. This large data set – collected between 2002 and 2004 – enabled us to analyze a representative sample of parent-adult child relationships across all age groups and under various conditions.

The following section (6.2), gives a summary of the main findings of this dissertation regarding the consequences of changes in family structure and in the nature of intergenerational family relationships. In Section 6.3, we discuss the findings and reflect on

their scientific and societal implications. We conclude with a section (6.4) on limitations and suggestions for future research.

6.2   Summary of findings

It has been suggested that, as many Western countries entered a new era in the mid-1960s, children born in the 1970s and 1980s were faced with a degree of family instability and complexity that is unique in the history of Western family life (e.g., Popenoe, 1993). The 'family decline hypothesis' is rooted in the negative consequences of family instability for the social, economic and psychological well-being of children (Popenoe, 1993: 3). Researchers examined the various implications of this change in family structure for children: schooling, income, occupational attainment, and familial and reproductive characteristics. Others suggested that the experiences of these children were similar to those of their great-grandparents when they were young (Griffith, 1980; Hareven, 2000). Until now, however, data on the familial environment in which children grew up *before* the emergence of the nuclear family, such as the degree of instability (mortality, stepfamily) family members had to face, have been lacking.

In Chapter 2, we wanted to reach beyond the history of the nuclear family (Bengtson, 2001), and have depicted the development of the living arrangements of children between 1850 and 2000. We did this by analyzing data from two different sources: the Historical Sample of the Netherlands (HSN) and the first wave of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS). Together, these two sources cover the changes in living arrangements of children born in the Netherlands between 1850 and 1985. We focused on two key characteristics of the familial setting in which the child grew up: first, on the presence or absence of its biological and stepparents at birth and at age 15, and second, on the social class the child grew up in.

There is every reason to expect that living arrangements of children differed according to the social class to which the family belonged. A clear social class gradient in adult mortality has always existed (Van Poppel, Deerenberg, Wolleswinkel-Van den Bosch, & Ekamper, 2005) and continues to exist (Janssen, 2005). The risk that children would experience the death of one their parents differed by social class. Non-marital fertility was concentrated in low social classes, leading to clear differences in the percentage of children living without a biological father (Shorter et al., 1971). The risk of divorce was higher in the upper social classes (Van Poppel, 1997).

The first research challenge places the emergence and presumed decline of the nuclear family in the context of long-term developments in Dutch families. The research question was:

(1) How did the living arrangements of Dutch children aged 0 to 15 change between 1850 and 2000, and to what extent did the changes differ by social class?

The results showed that living in a non-intact family is much less common today than it was a century ago. Living without one's biological parents became more and more of an exception. Among children born between 1850 and 1964, there has been a continuous decrease in the percentage living without either of their biological parents. The percentage of children living without a biological father or stepfather and those living without a biological mother or stepmother has decreased over the past generations. It is only in the most recent generation that this trend started to reverse. Growing up with a mother, but without a father or stepfather again became more common for children born after the mid-1960s, when the percentages almost reached nineteenth-century levels. An interesting finding was the opposing trend found in the percentage of children living with the biological mother and a stepfather (increase) and the percentage living with the biological father and a stepmother (decrease). The shift from mortality to divorce as the main source of instability gave mothers a more central role as caregivers in disrupted families than fathers.

We observed striking differences and changes over time in living arrangements between social classes. Whereas in the past spending one's childhood in a complete family was less common among the working classes, in more recent cohorts living in an intact family became less common among the upper/middle classes than among the less educated. A reversal also took place in the percentages of children living with their mother alone. Whereas in the past children from working-class families were more likely to grow up without a father or stepfather, this situation is now more common among children of more highly educated families. Note also that in the most recent birth cohort more children in the lower social classes live in a mother-headed family than was the case among children born in the period 1923-1964.

In sum, our historical review of the changing family structure revealed that family instability and childhood disruption is no new feature of Western family life, as is often assumed. Family life was and will always be in flux. Myopic views on families implicitly idealize the romantic fifties and give no credit to the merits of family life beyond the nuclear model (Bengtson, 2001).

We also saw that around 1850 children grew up with a very limited number of siblings, but this number started to increase from the middle of the nineteenth century; it was only after the last decade of the nineteenth century that small families started to become the norm. After 1920, and again after 1960, the mean number of siblings with whom children grew up fell dramatically. This development was accompanied by a strong increase in longevity. Family structure increasingly verticalized from a pyramid into a 'beanpole', tall and thin, with few people in each generation (Bengtson, 2001; Seltzer et al., 2005). The beanpole family structure has implications for intergenerational contacts as there are relatively few parent-child relationships and parents and children are able to spend a relatively long time together during the course of their lives. We expect that this will affect the relationship between parents and their adult children. These developments in the structure of Western

families call for, among other things, greater attention to siblings when studying the meaning of parent-child relationships.

In Chapter 3 we saw that the time children and their parents spend together during childhood and in adulthood is an important way of investing in their relationship. More specifically, the amount of parent-child contact in adulthood may in part be regarded as an exchange, based on the principle of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960; Silverstein, 2004): The more attention, support or love a child receives during childhood or shortly thereafter, the more contact parents and children will have in later life. This exchange mechanism changes with the changing family structure, in particular the decrease in the number of siblings. Having fewer parent-child ties per family increases the investments per relationship. We should note that the more children one has, the greater the total amount of intergenerational contact for this particular person (Uhlenberg & Cooney, 1990).

A consistent conclusion in earlier studies is that the size of the sibling group is an important restriction on parent-child contact (see, e.g., Lye, 1996). Family scholars have generally ignored, however, that the importance of brothers or sisters for the relationship between parents and children goes beyond their numbers (McHale & Crouter, 2004). We have argued that, although contact investments in parent-child relationships are essentially dyadically based, they are influenced by the sibling network in which they are embedded.

Moreover, parent-child ties within one family are characterized by interdependency: interactions between a parent and a child are influenced by the position of that child within the sibling network (cf. Kelley et al., 2003; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Although there is less formal or informal pressure to invest in brothers and sisters than in the relationships with parents and children, the sibling tie is the family relationship with the longest duration. Studies have shown that siblings matter to siblings. They exchange support, have relatively much contact and can be important companions, friends and points of reference in life (Matthews, 2002; Voorpostel, 2007). Furthermore, siblings often share the intense period of growing up and interact with the same very important persons during that time: their mutual parents. In return, parents must divide their attention among their children. Parents may try to treat all children equally, but some will be treated more equally than others, for example, due to favoritism (Hertwig et al., 2002).

With respect to the second research challenge we considered the effect of the (a) basic characteristics of the sibling network and (b) the specific position of adult children within the network on the relationship between adult children and their parents. The research question was:

(2) How do characteristics of the sibling network shape parent-child contact?

A drawback of studies on parent-child contact is the focus on either high-quality or significant relationships (nearest living or oldest child). As our data – the first wave of the Netherlands

Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) – contain a large sample of complete kin networks, we could analyze a wide age range of adult children. In addition, the data provided us with a random sample of adult child-parent relationships.

We found that the sibling network perspective adds to our understanding of differences in the frequency of contact between parents and their adult children. Controlling for dyadic-level restrictions like proximity and liking, parent-child dyads are also influenced by the network. We found that distinguishing between having sisters and brothers was more fruitful than just considering the number of children. Contact frequency is highest if the adult child is an only child, intermediate if the adult child has one or more brothers, and lowest if he/she has one or more sisters. Another finding was that adult children with stepsiblings tend to see their parents less often than those without stepsiblings. Furthermore, the more cohesive the sibling network, the higher the level of contact between parents and children.

Contact levels also vary depending on the position adult children occupy in the sibling network. We could confirm that differences between parent-child dyads within families are associated with differences in contact within these dyads, as has been suggested in qualitative studies (Matthews, 2002; Matthews & Rosner, 1988). One central finding was that if an adult child has a sibling who is geographically or emotionally closer to the parent, he/she was likely to have considerably less contact with his/her parent. This effect was found to be even stronger when the parent was restricted due to health problems. In addition, contact was lower than the network average if the child did not receive financial support from the parent whereas another child did.

In Chapter 4 we shifted our analytical interest from the structural setting to the nature of intergenerational relationships. First, we claimed that in order to understand the differences between parent-child relationships, one should include multidimensional aspects of the investment in the relationship – contact, instrumental and emotional support. Second, we claimed that both interaction and support (solidarity) on the one hand, and tensions and anger (conflict) on the other, are important aspects of the interactions between parents and children.

This brought us to our third challenge, which was to better understand the nature of contemporary parent-child ties by simultaneously investigating solidarity and conflict. The research question was:

(3) Can parent-child types of relationships be empirically distinguished on the basis of solidarity and conflict, and if so, what is their incidence?

In social research, there used to be a tendency to portray families either as places of peace, refuge and harmony, or as places of abuse, anger and violence. Intergenerational solidarity and conflict have mostly been studied separately, assuming that family solidarity and conflict are each other's opposites on a continuum. The idea that solidarity and conflict are opposites ignores the common knowledge that, though family life is programmed for cooperation, love,

mutual support and happiness, there is also a high probability for family members to have conflicts (Sprey, 1969; Tyrell, 2001). Moreover, the socio-cultural shift of family relationships from ascribed to achieved ties, combined with the fact that there are fewer intergenerational ties (fewer siblings) to choose from, may even increase the likelihood of simultaneously exchanging support and having tensions in contemporary parent-child relationships.

In Chapter 4 we started by arguing, based on classical sociological theory, that the coexistence of harmony or convergence (pulls) and strain or divergence (pushes) is inevitable in close relationships such as family ties (Coser, 1956; Simmel, 1904). Bengtson and colleagues (1996) were pioneers in recognizing the need to simultaneously study intergenerational solidarity and conflict. Pushes and pulls are inevitable in parent-child ties because of the intense, interdependent bonds they have as they grow up and age (Bengtson et al., 1996: 273; Rook, 1998). We were the first to analyze this idea empirically and to investigate different features of solidarity (face-to-face and phone contact, instrumental and emotional support) and conflict (material and personal issues) in one analysis. In addition, we positioned our work in the recent scientific debate on intergenerational ambivalence (Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998).

Using multiple dimensions of solidarity and conflict in a latent class analysis, we developed a typology of adult child-parent relationships with the aid of data from the first wave of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study. In descending order of relationship quality, the five types are: harmonious (40%; akin to relationships with friends); ambivalent (29%; intensive exchange of material support accompanied by strain); obligatory (16%; just keeping in touch), affective (11%; emotionally supportive with few other meaningful exchanges); and discordant (4%; predominantly negative engagement). The types are differentiated by gender, age, family size, geographic distance and parental marital history, indicating that they are not fixed but are shaped by socio-structural conditions.

In general, we found that the majority of parents and adult children in the Netherlands meet regularly, exchange high levels of support, report few conflicts and perceive a high relationship quality. Another central finding is that ambivalence – high levels of both solidarity and conflict – is *not* a general state adult children and parents find themselves in, as some scholars have suggested (e.g., Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998). We examined adult child-parent relationships in a large, representative sample, albeit that our sample is somewhat selective towards high-quality relationships and that we left out broken ties. Neither did we focus on specific vulnerable groups – e.g., elderly widows or caregivers of individuals with chronic diseases – as has been done in other studies (e.g., Lang, 2004).

We found that high solidarity/high conflict was most likely among adult children who were young adults, that is, in a phase in which support exchange and tensions are part of the developmental phase of the relationship. More in general we found that the situation of co-existence of solidarity and conflict is often a healthy one (cf. Simmel, 1904). However, our

results also suggest that the likelihood of the behavioral state of ambivalence is highest when structural conditions offer fewer *escape* options (Smelser, 1998). This is the case when there are fewer options to ignore responsibilities towards kin (living nearby, small number of siblings, widowed parents), when people have difficulty acting against normative obligations to care (daughters, cf. Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Willson et al., 2003), and when one of the individual is dependent on assistance (e.g. young adults or frail elderly). Despite these considerations, the *overall* correlation between relationship quality and ambivalence remained positive.

In Chapter 5 we expand on this analysis and investigate whether under specific circumstances, variation in exit options can be associated with differences in relationship quality. We challenge the common notion that contact and support (solidarity) necessarily have positive implications whereas conflict has negative implications by investigating intergenerational ambivalence – defined as the co-occurrence of solidarity and conflict – and relationship quality.

(4) What conditions increase the likelihood that high contact and high levels of support exchange between adult children and their parents are negatively rather than positively associated with relationship quality?

We defined negative ambivalent relationships as ties in which solidarity and conflict are combined with poor relationship quality. Positive ambivalent relationships were seen as ties in which solidarity and conflict are combined with high relationship quality. We focused on non-coresident adult children and parents with high levels of contact (weekly or more). We believed that the negative effect of decreasing exit options on relationship quality is most prevalent in such high-contact ties because parents and children in such ties live close enough to each other to experience the tension between divergence and convergence (Simmel, 1904). We formulated hypotheses about the adult child's exit options based on the probability of a negative rather than a positive ambivalent relationship, and argued that the child's exit options were a function of the (a) personal ability to see exits, (b) the availability of exits, (c) the normative barriers against exiting, and (d) the relative need for exits.

Using multiple dimensions of solidarity and conflict, and a measure for relationship quality in one latent class analysis, we developed a typology of intergenerational high-contact relationships. We used data from the first wave of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study and found four types: The close-distant type (33%; low support, low conflict, and high quality), the positive balanced ambivalent type (32%; moderate support exchange, low conflict, and high quality), the positive dependent ambivalent type (24%; high support towards parent, low conflict, high quality), and the negative ambivalent type (11%; moderate support towards parent, high conflict, poor quality).

Our first conclusion was that the vast majority of Dutch parents and children who meet at least on a weekly basis have ambivalent relationships: they support each other and simultaneously have conflicts. This does not undermine, but qualifies Homans' (1958) idea that ties become stronger as partners have more frequent contact and exchange more support.

Second, we found that ambivalence is more often perceived as something positive rather than as something negative. This finding confirmed the idea that both solidarity and conflict are bonding elements within parent-child ties.

A third conclusion is that reduced exit options contribute to negative ambivalence in close relationships (Smelser, 1998). Those who are socially isolated and thus have few exit options via alternative relationships are more likely to end up in negative ambivalent ties. Furthermore, having a smaller number of siblings also increases the likelihood of being part of negative ambivalent ties. Assertiveness, as an indicator of the personal ability to see exit options, or geographic proximity did not play a role. Contrary to expectations, those with strong family obligations were more likely to be part of positive rather than of negative ambivalent relationships. This confirms the theoretical idea that norms have a bonding impact in family relationships (Coleman, 1990; Hechter, 1987). Norms do not operate as a barrier against exiting, but should rather be seen as a buffer against intense pushes and pulls in high-contact family relationships. Our controls for age revealed that whereas young adults are more likely to be in a positive balanced ambivalent tie, older adult children are more likely to be in a positive dependent ambivalent tie, caring for their ageing parents in midlife. Gender controls showed that, in contrast to findings from earlier research, the greatest negativity does not lie in mothers' relationships (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002). In all life phases, fathers are much more likely to find themselves in negative ambivalent relationships.

Fourth, we found that the likelihood of negative rather than positive ambivalent ties increases if a socially not normally expected situation emerges that deviates from social prescriptions. An example is a situation where caring middle-aged daughters receive a relatively large amount of support from their elderly parent, although the reversed dependency structure – an ageing parent depending on the daughter – is socially expected. Another 'abnormal' state of interdependence is a situation in which parents (especially fathers) must rely on their young adult children's (especially their sons') support.

6.3 Contributions to intergenerational family relationship research

This book seeks to improve the understanding of intergenerational ties by formulating and empirically investigating new challenges for intergenerational family relationship research. In this section we will summarize the main contributions of our research.

First, the design of the data sets we used enabled us to do analyses that have never been done before. We could depict the exact first 15 years of the lives of Dutch children over a time spam of 150 years (HSN/NKPS). The NKPS enabled us to analyze a very wide age range of intergenerational bonds (age children: 18-79 years old) and focus on randomly

selected parent-child ties. This greatly improved the generalizability of our findings. Lastly, the NKPS enabled us to analyze the complete sibling network rather than selected dyads.

Second, our study qualifies the family decline perspective in the debate about the relationship between children and their parents during childhood. We acknowledge that modernization processes have decreased the level of interdependency between parents and their children (e.g., Coleman, 1990). And we believe there is much to support the claim of family decline as a large number of studies have convincingly shown the negative implications of family disruption on the lives of children as they grow up and during adulthood (e.g. Amato & Keith, 1991; Fischer, 2004; Sigle-Rushton et al., 2005). However, our long-term perspective on the living arrangements of children has brought to light the biographical experiences of children from the past to the present time. Researchers and politicians should be careful when comparing contemporary family life with the extraordinary situation Western families were in just after the Second World War (Cherlin, 1980; Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000; Uhlenberg, 1993). To some degree, contemporary complexities are more comparable to those in the 19th century, although the sources of these complexities are different.

Third, our study qualifies the idea that the relationship between adult children and their parents in contemporary society is losing significance. A problem in the family decline debate is that families are being confused with households, as Popenoe defines family as a domestic group of kin, ignoring cross-generational kinship support structures (Bengtson et al., 1996: 254). For contemporary parents and children, the stimulus for mutual investments arises from the fact that economic independence, market activities and friendships cannot be a full substitute for the emotional qualities of the parent/child relationship (Astone et al., 1999; Huinink, Strohmeier, & Wagner, 2001). In other words, relationships between parents and children today are not cemented by a clear scenario – ruled by material dependencies – but are increasingly based on free choice, feelings and friendship. We have shown that the vast majority of the parents and adult children in our study manage to sustain regular contact, support each other, feel emotionally close, and have high-quality relationships.

Fourth, we have also revealed several aspects of 'the sibling's role in the beanpole'. The most interesting result is that parent-child ties are influenced not only by their individual and relational circumstances, but also by those of other parent-child ties within the same family.

Fifth, our study helps to better understand what binds and undermines the relationship between adult children and their parents today. We have shown that solidarity and conflict are not each other's opposites. Both the divergent elements (pulls) and the convergent elements (pushes) explain what binds and undermines the relationship between parents and children. Contemporary adult children and their parents may often even exchange support and simultaneously have conflicts. In addition, we have shown that it is important to acknowledge that solidarity and conflict are both multidimensional concepts. For example, one can support

each other emotionally by phone and yet almost never meet, due to simple restrictions like geographic distance.

Sixth, our study qualifies the recent debate on intergenerational ambivalence. We believe in the merits of using behavioral measures for ambivalence. Pushes and pulls reflect what parents and children actually do, alongside their evaluation of their relationship by means of the level of emotional closeness or relationship quality. We also found that frequent contact is not to be equated with high quality, contrary to what is often suggested (Homans, 1958). For some relationships, geographical distance is rather associated with emotional closeness. Whereas these parents and children almost never see each other, they report high-quality relationships. For others, weekly or more frequent contact and high levels of support exchanges can be 'too much of a good thing' (cf. Silverstein et al., 1996). We have also shown that the combination of ambivalence and relationship quality improves our understanding of how and why circumstances either bind or undermine the relationship. We found that ambivalence is not to be equated with poor quality. Relationships are more stressful and of poorer quality if individuals (in our study: the adult children) do not have sufficient 'exit options' – that is, they cannot easily withdraw from the relationship with the other person (in our study: the parent).

6.4   Limitations and suggestions for future research

In Chapter 2 we depicted the development of the living arrangements of children between 1850 and 2000. For children born before 1923, we used a random sample of birth certificates, but for those born after that year, we were only able to use survey data of 'survivors', as the interviews were held in 2002 and 2003. And as mortality differs in particular by social class we may have an overrepresentation of the more privileged among the elderly in the NKPS sample. We partly controlled for this selectivity as we accounted for class differences in our descriptive analyses of the parental structure during childhood. In addition, the HSN data set has recently been expanded with all other Dutch provinces. In future research, besides describing changes as accurately as we did, the large historical database (N=77,000) will enable researchers to estimate the risks of experiencing changes in living arrangements during childhood, taking into account age, period and cohort effects, socio-economic class, level of urbanization and macro-level social, economic and demographic indicators. Additionally, we still know little about how the effects of changes in living arrangements during childhood on the life courses of individuals have changed over historical time (Weymann, 1998). It will be possible to model long-term consequences of different living arrangements (non-intact family, stepparent) in childhood on life course transitions (status first job, entering first marriage, parenthood, and divorce) in adulthood between 1850 and 2000.

The moderate response rate of the NKPS is a limitation of our study. In general, response rates in the Netherlands tend to be lower than elsewhere and they seem to be declining over time (De Leeuw & De Heer, 2001). The Dutch appear to be particularly

sensitive about privacy issues. Analyses of the representativity of the NKPS sample (Dykstra et al., 2005) revealed an underrepresentation of men and young adults, and an overrepresentation of women with children living at home. Residents of highly urban and highly rural areas are also underrepresented in the sample, a pattern often seen in survey research. It is reasonable to assume that selectivity affects the distribution of relationship types (Chapters 4 and 5) as is, for example, evident in an overrepresentation of high-quality relationships in the NKPS sample (Dykstra et al., 2005). Although we believe our focus on the 95% 'active ties' was scientifically relevant enough to justify this limitation, future research could try to explain differences between active and 'inactive' intergenerational ties. It would be interesting to know whether discordant ties, which are ties characterized by low levels of contact and support exchange as well as low levels of conflicts over material issues and moderate levels of conflicts over emotional issues, really differ from broken ties: What saves them from losing contact?

A major advantage of the NKPS data set is that it is a nation-wide survey, so we can investigate the main framework of the intergenerational structure in the Netherlands. We cannot, however, analyze relatively small subgroups of parent-child bonds. For example, the NKPS has no substantial data on middle-aged adult children and parents who share the same house, which can be regarded as the ultimate form of intergenerational solidarity and the perfect condition for ambivalence. Barely being able to locate multigenerational households in a survey is not surprising, as parent-adult child co-residence has decreased in the Netherlands, as in many other Western countries. Between 1960 and 1990 the percentage of ever-married elderly (aged 65 years and up) who lived with an adult child decreased from 25% to 10% (Van Solinge, 1993). Another example of a small subgroup are families with step ties. Oversampling less common living arrangements and family ties could be interesting in the future. In addition, the multi-method approach of the NKPS also enables researchers to use the existing sample and to do qualitative research (so-called 'minipanels') among members of such groups.

One promising new way of getting a better grip on non-response, as well as on small subgroups, is the use of register data, in collaboration with Statistics Netherlands (SN) (Dykstra, 2006). The Social Statistical Database (in Dutch: *Sociaal Statistisch Bestand, SSB*) is an integrated, longitudinal database of numerous registers and surveys, containing the most important socio-demographic and socio-economic variables – checked on consistency – of the complete population of the Netherlands (Arts, Bakker, & Van Lith, 2000; Van der Laan, 2000). The SSB has data on all individuals, and thus also on subgroups, that are hard to catch with normal survey research. The future link between the SSB and the survey data (such as the NKPS) will enable us to better control for selectivity due to non-response (Geuzinge, Van Rooijen, & Bakker, 2000; Te Riele, 2002). The SSB may be used to depict the basic characteristics of entire 'marginal' social groups and to serve as a sample framework to draw a subsample for further (survey) research. It could also be used to gather extra or missing

information on respondents, their relatives, (ex-)partners, other household members, or even their colleagues and neighbors. Finally, researchers can in the future enrich their own survey data with consistent socio-demographic/-economic information taken from the SSB, which would allow them to focus on asking respondents questions about more subjective and/or project-specific topics (for more information see e.g., Arts & Hoogteijling, 2002; Statistics Netherlands, 2007b).

An enormous advantage of the NKPS data set is that it provides two sides of many family relationships, so-called multi-actor data. The literature suggests that parents and children differ systematically in their perception of their relationship (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Giarrusso, Stallings, & Bengtson, 1995), which has recently been confirmed (Mandemakers & Dykstra, 2007). Unfortunately, we did not use multi-actor data in this study. We could have conducted separate latent class analyses for the parent and the child, which might have revealed that similarity between the types of relationships is greater in high-quality ties than in low- quality ties (Chapter 4 and 5). However, we focused on the general intergenerational structure, and the merits of the multi-actor design did not outweigh the drawbacks: our sample size would decrease and become more selective towards high-quality ties as the overall response was highest in families that were emotionally closest.

In this study, our goal was not to investigate possible similarities and differences between native and non-native Dutch parent-child relationships regarding, for example, the role of siblings or the solidarity/conflict typology. It is important to expand on these analyses in the future with a special focus on non-natives, as the migrant population is both growing and ageing (Statistics Netherlands, 2007a). Others have already shown similarities and differences regarding parent-child solidarity between ethnic groups in the Netherlands (e.g., Schans & Komter, 2006).

Finally, in our analyses of intergenerational relationships in contemporary society (Chapters 3 to 5), we can only make use of cross-sectional data. Most explanatory power in sociological analyses lies in the investigation of changes over time (Dronkers & Ultee, 1995; Steinhage & Blossfeld, 1999), especially where solidarity, conflict and relationship quality are concerned., The fieldwork of the second wave of the NKPS has recently been concluded. New challenges regarding the dynamics in intergenerational family relationships lie before us. For example, future research efforts should also be directed at studying shifts within the parent-child relationship typology over time. The focus could be on changes in the dependency structure between parents and children as an explanatory process, for example, if the health situation of parents gets worse. It would be interesting to understand more about the conditions under which one and not the other sibling takes care of the parent. Finally, we would like to know why relationships shift between positive and negative ambivalent ties. The second and future waves of the NKPS will make such longitudinal analyses possible.

SAMENVATTING
(Summary in Dutch)

SAMENVATTING (Summary in Dutch)

In dit proefschrift werden nieuwe uitdagingen op het gebied van onderzoek naar intergenerationele familierelaties geformuleerd en empirisch onderzocht. De basis werd gevormd door belangrijke sociaaldemografische en sociaalculturele ontwikkelingen die veranderingen teweegbrachten in Westerse families, waarbij de aandacht werd gericht op Nederland. Dit waren veranderingen in (1) de *structuur* van families en veranderingen in (2) de *inhoud* van intergenerationele familierelaties. Veranderingen in de familiestructuur zijn (a) de opkomst en (b) de neergang van het kerngezin, (c) toenemende heterogeniteit binnen families, en (d) een toenemend belang van intergenerationele relaties. Belangrijke veranderingen in de inhoud van intergenerationele familierelaties zijn: (a) de afnemende van wederzijdse afhankelijkheid in de verschuiving van overwegend plichtrelaties naar meer keuzerelaties, (b) de toenemende nadruk op emoties en relatiekwaliteit, gepaard gaand met (c) toenemende complexiteit, (d) gelijkwaardigheid en onderhandeling in ouder-kind relaties. Er werden vier verschillende onderzoeksuitdagingen geformuleerd, die voortvloeien uit de beschreven ontwikkelingen. De eerste richtte zich op de ouderlijke structuur waarin kinderen opgroeien en de overige drie op intergenerationele relaties waarin het kind volwassen is.

De eerste uitdaging was om de opkomst en de vermeende teloorgang van het kerngezin in een lange termijn context te plaatsen. Ik deed dit door het analyseren van de veranderingen in de samenstelling van de huishoudens waarin kinderen opgroeiden tussen 1850 en 2000 in Nederland. De tweede uitdaging was om het toenemende belang van broers en zusters voor ouder-kind relaties te onderzoeken. Dit deed ik tegen de achtergrond van een structurele versmalling van de familiestructuur (afnemend kindertal) en verlenging van de gezamenlijke levenstijd (vergrijzing). Daarvoor nam ik het broer/zus netwerk als context voor de relatie tussen volwassen kinderen en hun ouders. De derde uitdaging was om meer van de inhoud van hedendaagse ouder-kind relaties te begrijpen. Leidende gedachte was dat het zinvol is meerdere dimensies van de relatie te bezien en dat min of meer alle ouder-kind banden zowel relatie-bindende als wel relatie-ondermijnende elementen kennen. Ik deed dit door meerdere dimensies van zowel solidariteit als conflict gelijktijdig te onderzoeken. De vierde uitdaging was om, ervan uitgaande dat het hebben van keuzevrijheid belangrijker wordt in familierelaties, meer te begrijpen waarom sommige ouder-kind relaties goed en stabiel zijn terwijl andere slecht en instabiel zijn. Ik deed dit door me te richten op variatie in de mate van keuzevrijheid in intense relaties, dat wil zeggen ouders en kinderen die elkaar wekelijks of vaker ontmoeten, en door meerdere dimensies van solidariteit en conflict te combineren met relatiekwaliteit in één analyse.

Data

De analyses werden gedaan met gegevens van de Historische Steekproef Nederland (HSN) (uitdaging 1) en de Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) (uitdaging 1 tot 4). De HSN omvat informatie over de volledige levensgeschiedenis van een 0,5 procent willekeurige steekproef (77000 geboorteakten) van mannen en vrouwen geboren in Nederland tussen 1812 en 1922. Deze dataset bood mij de gelegenheid om lange termijn veranderingen in de huishoudens van opgroeiende kinderen in Nederland in kaart te brengen. De NKPS is een aselecte steekproef van meer dan 8000 individuen binnen privé huishoudens. Deze grote dataset – verzameld tussen 2002 en 2004 – biedt de gelegenheid om een representatieve steekproef van ouder-kind relaties te analyseren van verschillende leeftijdsgroepen en onder verschillende omstandigheden.

Uitwerking van de onderzoeksuitdagingen en de resultaten

Er wordt vaak verondersteld dat de neergang van het kerngezin sinds de jaren '60 uniek is in de geschiedenis van het Westelijk gezinsleven. De zogenaamde *'family decline hypothesis'* wortelt in de negatieve gevolgen van instabiliteit binnen families voor het sociale, economische, en psychologische welzijn van kinderen. Echter, tot nu toe waren er onvoldoende gegevens over de huishoudens waarin kinderen opgroeiden vóór de opkomst van het kerngezin. De eerste uitdaging zet de opkomst en neergang van het kerngezin in de context van lange termijn ontwikkelingen in Nederlandse families. In hoofdstuk 2 beoogde ik de ontwikkeling van de huishoudsamenstelling van opgroeiende kinderen van vóór de opkomst van het kerngezin tot aan het heden in kaart brengen, dat wil zeggen tussen 1850 en 2000. Dit werd gedaan door het analyseren van gegevens van twee verschillende bronnen: de HSN en de NKPS. Ik concentreerde me in het bijzonder op twee hoofdkenmerken van het huishouden waarin het kind leefde: ten eerste de aanwezigheid of afwezigheid van de biologische en stiefouders bij de geboorte van het kind tot het moment dat het kind 15 jaar oud is. Ten tweede werd de analyse uitgevoerd naar de sociale klasse waartoe de familie behoorde. De onderzoeksvraag was als volgt:

(1) Hoe veranderde de huishoudsituatie van Nederlandse kinderen van 0 tot 15 jaar tussen 1850 en 2000 en in welke mate verschilden veranderingen tussen sociale klassen?

We verwachtten dat de leefsituatie van kinderen verschilden al naar gelang de sociale klasse waartoe de familie behoorde. Een duidelijk klassenverschil in sterftekans heeft altijd bestaan en ook nu nog verschillen de risico's voor kinderen om de dood van één hun ouders mee te maken per sociale klasse. De buitenechtelijke vruchtbaarheid concentreerde zich in de lagere sociale klasse en leidden tot duidelijke verschillen in het percentage van kinderen die moesten leven zonder een biologische vader. Echtscheidingkansen waren en zijn hoger in de hogere sociale klassen.

De resultaten lieten zien dat leven in een niet-intacte familie tegenwoordig veel minder vaak voorkomt dan een eeuw geleden. Leven zonder beide biologische ouders werd meer en meer een uitzondering. Het percentage kinderen dat zonder een biologische vader of stiefvader en zonder een biologische moeder of stiefmoeder opgroeide is sterk afgenomen. Het is pas in de meest recente geboortecohorten dat deze trend begint om te keren. Opgroeiende kinderen met een moeder, maar zonder een (stief)vader komen sinds het midden van de jaren '60 weer bijna net zo vaak voor als in de negentiende eeuw. Een interessante bevinding was de tegengestelde trend in het percentage van kinderen die met moeder en een stiefvader (toename) leeft en het percentage wonend met de biologische vader en een stiefmoeder (afname). Het krijgen van kinderen was in de negentiende eeuw voor moeders een relatief groot gezondheidsrisico: stierf de moeder, dan ging de vader vaak op zoek naar een nieuwe partner. De verschuiving van sterfte naar scheiding als hoofdoorzaak voor de instabiliteit binnen gezinnen gaf moeders een centralere rol als verzorger in de betroffen families dan vaders.

Er werden interessante verschillen tussen sociale klassen zichtbaar. In het verleden brachten kinderen uit lagere sociale klassen hun jeugd minder vaak in een volledige familie door terwijl het in recenter cohorten juist de hogere en middenklasse was die eerder in een niet-intacte familie leeft. Een omkering vond ook plaats in de percentages van kinderen die alleen met hun moeder leven; in het verleden waren het voornamelijk kinderen uit de lagere sociale klassen die zonder een (stief)vader opgroeiden, terwijl dit nu vaker voorkomt onder kinderen uit de hogere en middenklassen. Opmerkelijk is dat in het meest recente geboortecohort in lagere sociale klassen een hoger percentage kinderen slechts met hun moeder opgroeien dan kinderen uit dezelfde sociale klasse die werden geboren tussen 1923-1964.

Eveneens werd duidelijk dat kinderen rond 1850 opgroeiden met relatief weinig broertjes en zusjes. Vanaf die tijd begon dat aantal te stijgen en rond 1900 nam het weer af. Het aantal broertjes en zusjes nam na 1920 en vervolgens weer na 1960 sterk af. Deze ontwikkeling gaat samen met een sterke toename van de levensverwachting. De familiestructuur nam meer en meer de vorm aan van een 'bonenstaak', lang en dun, met weinig mensen in iedere generatie. De bonenstaak familie heeft onder andere implicaties voor de relatie tussen kinderen en hun ouders: er zijn relatief weinig ouder-kind relaties en er zijn relatief veel levensjaren om samen door te brengen. Buiten het feit dat ouders daardoor tegenwoordig gemiddeld meer aandacht aan hun kinderen kunnen geven dan vroeger, verwacht ik dat de bonenstaak structuur ook belangrijk wordt als kinderen volwassen zijn. Deze ontwikkelingen vragen, onder andere, om meer aandacht voor broers en zusters in onderzoek van intergenerationele relaties.

In Hoofdstuk 3 wordt de tijd die kinderen en hun ouders samen doorbrengen beschouwd als een belangrijke investering in hun relatie. De hoeveelheid contact tussen ouders en volwassen kinderen kan gedeeltelijk worden beschouwd als ruil, gebaseerd op het

principe van wederkerigheid: hoe meer aandacht, steun, of liefde een kind tijdens de jeugd ontvangt, des te meer contact hebben ouders en kinderen op latere leeftijd. De werking van dit ruilmechanisme is met de afname van het aantal broers en zussen gewijzigd: bij minder ouder-kind relaties per familie nemen de investeringen per relatie meestal toe.

We weten dat ouder-kind contact in de essentie afhangt van de kansen (bijv. woonafstand, vrije tijd) en de wensen (bijv. sterkte van de band, afhankelijkheden) om elkaar te ontmoeten. En een eensluidende conclusie uit eerder onderzoek is inderdaad dat de hoeveelheid broers en zusters sterk bepalend is voor de hoeveelheid ouder-kind contact: hoe meer kinderen, des te minder contact onderhouden de afzonderlijke kinderen met hun ouder. Echter, onderzoekers gaan meestal voorbij aan het feit dat het belang van broers/zusters voor de ouder-kind relatie groter is dan hun aantal alleen: naast het aantal kinderen wordt contact ook beïnvloed door andere kenmerken van het broer/zus netwerk.

Met betrekking tot de tweede onderzoeksuitdaging onderzocht ik het effect van (a) de basiskenmerken van het broer/zus netwerk en (b) de specifieke positie van volwassen kinderen binnen dat netwerk op de band tussen volwassen kinderen en hun ouders. De onderzoeksvraag was:

(2) Hoe beïnvloedt het broer/zus netwerk en de positie binnen dat netwerk het contact tussen ouders en volwassen kinderen?

Een tekortkoming van bestaande studies over ouder-kind contact is de nadruk op significante relaties (het dichtstbij wonende, het favoriete, of het oudste kind). Wij richtten ons ook niet op specifieke, kwetsbare groepen – bijvoorbeeld bejaarde weduwen of mantelzorgende kinderen van ouders met chronische ziekten. Het doel van deze studie was om meer te begrijpen over ouder-kind relaties in het algemeen, daarbij wel variatie aanbrengend in leeftijd en gezondheid. De eerste golf van de Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) – bevatte een grote steekproef van volledige verwantschapsnetwerken waardoor ik een brede leeftijdsgroep van volwassen kinderen kon analyseren. Bovendien bevatten deze gegevens een willekeurige steekproef van volwassen ouder-kind relaties binnen families.

Het broer/zus netwerkperspectief vergroot het begrip van verschillen in de frequentie van contact tussen ouders en hun volwassen kinderen. Rekening houdend met dyadische beperkingen zoals geografische en emotionele nabijheid, bleek dat ouder-kind relaties worden beïnvloed door het broer/zus netwerk. Ik vond bijvoorbeeld dat het beter is onderscheid te maken tussen het aantal zusters en broers dan slechts het totale aantal kinderen. De frequentie van het contact is het hoogst als het volwassen kind geen broers of zusters heeft, is gemiddeld als het volwassen kind één of meerdere broers heeft, en is het laagst is als hij of zij één of meerdere zusters heeft. Verder zien volwassen kinderen met stiefbroers/zusters hun ouders gemiddeld minder vaak dan kinderen met alleen biologische broers/zusters. Voorts vond ik

dat hoe hoger de samenhang (gemiddelde geografische afstand, cohesie) binnen het broer/zus netwerk, des te hoger het aantal jaarlijkse contacten tussen ouders en kinderen.

Contactfrequentie is niet alleen afhankelijk van kenmerken van het broer/zus netwerk, deze hangt ook af van de positie die volwassen kinderen in het netwerk innemen. Een centrale uitkomst was dat als een volwassen kind een broer of zus heeft die geografisch of emotioneel dichterbij de ouder staat, dat dit kind aanzienlijk minder contact heeft met de ouder dan deze broer of zus. Het effect van een 'relatief grote emotionele afstand' werd zelfs nog sterker als de ouder gezondheidsproblemen heeft: op dat moment worden de verschillen in relatie kwaliteit tussen ouder-kind dyades nog belangrijker. Bovendien was het contact hoger dan het netwerkgemiddelde als het kind financiële steun van de ouder ontving terwijl een ander kind dit niet kreeg.

Samengevat kan worden geconcludeerd dat zowel structurele verschillen binnen het broer/zus netwerk als wel verschillen in posities die kinderen in die structuur innemen effect hebben op het aantal keren dat een ouder en een volwassen kind elkaar jaarlijks ontmoeten.

In Hoofdstuk 4 werd de aandacht gevestigd op de inhoud van intergenerationele banden en werd getracht de veelzijdigheid van deze relatie te structureren. Ten eerste werd gesteld dat men meerdere aspecten van de investering in de relatie (contact, instrumentele en emotionele steun) zou moeten bekijken om de verschillen tussen ouder-kind relaties te begrijpen. Ten tweede werd gesteld – ondersteund door het werk van klassieke sociologen zoals George Simmer en Lewis Coser – dat contact en steun (solidariteit) enerzijds, en spanningen en discussie (conflict) anderzijds, belangrijke aspecten van de interactie tussen ouders en kinderen zijn.

Dit leidde tot de derde onderzoeksuitdaging, die als doel had de inhoud van hedendaagse ouder-kind relaties beter te begrijpen door solidariteit en conflict gelijktijdig te onderzoeken. De onderzoeksvraag was:

(3 Kunnen op basis van solidariteit en conflict verschillende typen ouder-kind relaties empirisch zinvol worden onderscheiden, en zo ja, in welke verhouding?

In sociaal wetenschappelijk onderzoek bestond tot nog toe de tendens om families ofwel als plek van vrede, samenhang, en harmonie, of als plek van ellende, ruzie, en problemen af te schilderen. Solidariteit en conflict tussen generaties werden daarom meestal afzonderlijk bestudeerd, waarbij werd aangenomen dat familiesolidariteit en -conflict elkaars tegengestelden op eenzelfde continuüm zijn. Deze assumptie gaat voorbij aan de alledaagse ervaring dat, hoewel het familieleven voor samenwerking, liefde, wederzijds steun en geluk geprogrammeerd is, er ook een hoge kans bestaat dat familieleden conflicten hebben. Er kan worden gezegd dat de co-existentie van harmonie en spanning in intieme relaties zoals familiebanden niet te vermijden is. Deze is juist onvermijdelijk in ouder-kind relaties vanwege de intense onderlinge afhankelijkheden die er bestaan, vooral als kinderen opgroeien

of als ouders op latere leeftijd hulpbehoevend worden. Bovendien kan dit werk in het recente wetenschappelijke debat over ambivalentie tussen generaties worden geplaatst: het gelijktijdig voorkomen van relatief veel solidariteit en conflict werd als ambivalent gedefinieerd. In tegenstelling tot ander onderzoek naar ambivalentie werd hier gekeken wat ouders en kinderen daadwerkelijk *doen* en niet of ze gemengde gevoelens ten opzichte van elkaar hebben. Vorig ambivalentie onderzoek richtte zich voornamelijk op specifiek kwetsbare groepen waarin meestal werd gesteld dat *alle* ouder-kind relaties ambivalent zijn en dat dit slecht is voor de relatiekwaliteit.

Solidariteit is in principe goed voor sociale relaties; bovenmatig veel conflicten beschadigen de meeste relaties. Echter, teveel steun, evenals het ontbreken van conflict zouden kunnen wijzen op een zwakke of zelfs een slechte band tussen ouders en kinderen. De vraag is hoe verschillende vormen van intergenerationele solidariteit en conflict zich tot elkaar verhouden en wat dit betekent voor de kwaliteit van de relatie. De sociaal-culturele verschuiving binnen familierelaties van 'moeten' naar 'kiezen', gecombineerd met het feit dat er minder kinderen/banden zijn om tussen te kiezen, verhoogt de kans op het gelijktijdig voorkomen van solidariteit en conflict in hedendaagse ouder-kind relaties zelfs nog.

Deze tweeslachtigheid van de ouder-kind relatie werd in voorliggende studie voor het eerst empirisch onderzocht gebruikmakend van data uit een grootschalig familieonderzoek. Ik deed dit door verschillende dimensies van zowel solidariteit (persoonlijk contact, telefooncontact, instrumentele en emotionele steun) als conflict (over materiële en persoonlijke kwesties) in één analyse mee te nemen. Door middel van een latente klassenanalyse werd een typologie van volwassen ouder-kind relaties ontwikkeld. Hiervoor werden de gegevens uit de eerste ronde van de Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) gebruikt. De vijf types zijn, op een afglijdende schaal wat betreft relatiekwaliteit: *harmonisch* (40%; veel solidariteit en weinig conflict); *ambivalent* (29%; intensieve uitwisseling van materiële steun gecombineerd met spanning); *verplicht* (16%; slechts contact houdend); *affectief* (11%; emotioneel steunend met weinig andere uitwisselingen); en *verwijderd* (4%; vrijwel geen contact en steun en overwegend negatief beladen).

In het algemeen bleek dat de meerderheid van de ouders en de volwassen kinderen in Nederland elkaar wekelijks zien, veel steun verlenen, weinig conflicten rapporteren, en een hoge relatiekwaliteit ervaren. Een andere centrale bevinding is dat ambivalentie – het voorkomen van zowel solidariteit als conflict – niet het beeld is waaraan alle relaties tussen volwassen kinderen en de ouders voldoen. Hoewel de steekproef enigszins selectief was (iets meer mensen met goede familierelaties) en dat gebroken relaties (geen contact in de afgelopen 12 maanden) uitgesloten werden uit de analyse, werden in mijn studie volwassen ouder-kind relaties in een grote, representatieve steekproef onderzocht.

Wij vonden dat een hoge mate van solidariteit en conflict (ambivalentie) vooral bij jongvolwassen kinderen te vinden was, een levensfase waarin steunuitwisseling en spanningen horen bij de relatie. Verder bleek dat de co-existentie van solidariteit en conflict

eigenlijk vaak een gezond teken is, omdat ambivalente relaties gemiddeld goed van kwaliteit zijn. De algemene samenhang tussen relatiekwaliteit en de kans op ambivalentie bleek positief. De vraag bleef of er variatie in relatiekwaliteit *binnen* de ambivalente groep bestaat en of deze wellicht te verklaren zou zijn met verschillen in de mate van het hebben van persoonlijke vrijheden binnen de relatie. Dit werd uitgewerkt in het laatste empirische hoofdstuk.

In Hoofdstuk 5 werd deze analyse uitgebreid in de laatstgenoemde richting en onderzochten of in specifieke omstandigheden variatie in het hebben van keuzevrijheden met verschillen in relatiekwaliteit samenhangen. Algemeen wordt aangenomen dat contact en steun (solidariteit) noodzakelijkerwijs positieve implicaties heeft, terwijl conflict negatieve implicaties heeft voor relatiekwaliteit. In dit laatste empirische deel van het onderzoek werd gekeken of dit inderdaad het geval is door ambivalentie tussen generaties – het zowel voorkomen van solidariteit en conflict – en relatiekwaliteit gezamenlijk te onderzoeken.

(4) Welke condities verhogen de kans dat veel contact en uitwisseling van steun tussen volwassen kinderen en hun ouders eerder negatief dan positief met relatiekwaliteit samenhangt?

Negatief ambivalente relaties werden gezien als relaties waarin solidariteit en conflict met een relatief slechte relatiekwaliteit worden gecombineerd. Positief ambivalente relaties werden gezien als relaties waarin solidariteit en conflict met hoge relatiekwaliteit worden gecombineerd. Ik richtte me op volwassen kinderen en ouders die niet in één huis woonden en die relatief veel contact met elkaar hadden (wekelijks of vaker). Ik verwachtte namelijk dat het negatieve effect van het hebben van minder uitwegen op relatiekwaliteit in deze relaties het beste waar te nemen is. Ouders en kinderen leven in dergelijke relaties dicht genoeg bij elkaar om spanning op te bouwen, zonder deze altijd te kunnen ontlopen. Verder is er nog genoeg variatie in bijvoorbeeld de leeftijd en de gezondheidstoestand van de betrokken personen om de effecten hiervan te onderzoeken.

Uitwegen dienen als ventielen die eventuele overdruk kunnen helpen te reguleren. Het hebben van uitwegen is ook te begrijpen als indicator voor het hebben van persoonlijke keuzevrijheid. Vooral in relaties waar wederzijdse afhankelijkheden een grote rol kunnen spelen is het hoogst relevant te kunnen blijven *kiezen* om elkaar te ontmoeten, om elkaar te helpen, en om dit juist *niet* te doen. Ik formuleerde hypothesen die de kans op een negatief in plaats van een positief ambivalente relatie voorspelden. Ik vermoedde dat de uitwegen van het kind een functie zijn van (a) de individuele capaciteit uitwegen waar te nemen, (b) de beschikbaarheid van uitwegen, (c) de normatieve barrières die het weggaan bemoeilijken, en (d) de relatieve behoefte aan uitwegen.

Wederom werd gebruik gemaakt van verschillende dimensies van solidariteit en conflict, maar deze werden nu gecombineerd met relatiekwaliteit in één latente klassenanalyse. Zo werd een typologie ontwikkeld van ouder-kind relaties die veel contact

onderhielden met behulp van gegevens van de eerste ronde van de Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS). Ik vond vier types: het *dichtbij-veraf* type (33%; weinig steunuitwisseling, weinig conflict, en hoge relatiekwaliteit), het *positief evenwichtig ambivalente* type (32%; matig steunuitwisseling, weinig conflict, en hoge relatiekwaliteit), het *positief afhankelijk ambivalente* type (24%; alleen veel steun van kind, weinig conflict, hoge relatiekwaliteit), en *het negatief ambivalente* type (11%; alleen (matig) steun van kind, veel conflict, slechte relatiekwaliteit).

De eerste conclusie was dat de overgrote meerderheid van Nederlandse ouders en de kinderen die elkaar op zijn minst wekelijks zien een ambivalente verhouding hebben: Zij steunen elkaar en hebben gelijktijdig conflicten. Dit nuanceert het idee dat banden per definitie goed en sterk zijn naarmate ouders en kinderen veel contact hebben en veel steun uitwisselen. Verder werd aangetoond dat jongvolwassenen eerder een positief *evenwichtige* ambivalente relatie met hun ouder hebben, terwijl oudere volwassen kinderen eerder een positief *afhankelijke* ambivalente relatie hebben.

Een tweede conclusie was dat ambivalentie (in deze studie door de ouder) vaker positief dan negatief wordt waargenomen. Ambivalentie heeft dus meerdere gezichten: het tegelijkertijd voorkomen van veel contact en steunuitwisseling met conflicten over materiële en persoonlijke zaken kunnen aanwijzingen vormen dat de relatie gezond is, maar het kan ook wijzen op ongezonde spanningen. Deze bevinding bevestigt het idee dat de combinatie van solidariteit en conflict zowel bindende als ook ondermijnende elementen in ouder-kind relaties kunnen vormen.

Een derde conclusie was dat het hebben van minder uitwegen tot negatieve ambivalentie in ouder-kind relaties bijdraagt. Kinderen die sociaal geïsoleerd zijn – dat wil zeggen een weinig tevredenstellend sociaal netwerk hebben – hebben eerder negatief ambivalente dan positief ambivalente relaties met hun ouders. Zij zijn afhankelijker van de band met hun ouder dan minder geïsoleerde kinderen en dit vergroot de kans op spanningen. Verder verhoogt het hebben van minder broers en/of zusters ook de kans op het hebben van een negatief ambivalente relatie: ouders en kinderen zijn meer op elkaar aangewezen. Tegen de verwachtingen werd vastgesteld dat sterkere normatieve verwachtingen jegens familiebanden eerder positief ambivalente dan negatief ambivalente relaties in de hand werken. Dit bevestigt het theoretische idee dat traditionele (familie)normen familierelaties bij elkaar kunnen houden. Normen werken dan niet als barrière, maar eerder als buffer tegen spanningen in de relaties tussen ouders en kinderen die elkaar relatief vaak zien. Verder bleek bovendien dat in tegenstelling tot bevindingen van eerder onderzoek, de kwaliteit van de relaties waarin veel contact wordt onderhouden hoger is met moeders dan met vaders: In alle levensfasen hebben vaders een veel grotere kans een negatief ambivalente relatie met hun kind te hebben.

Tenslotte vond ik dat de kans op een negatief ambivalente relatie stijgt in 'normatief ongewone' situaties. Een voorbeeld is een situatie waar de gevende dochter op middelbare

leeftijd een vrij grote hoeveelheid steun van hun relatief oude moeder of vader ontvangt, hoewel de omgekeerde verhouding – een ouder afhankelijk van de dochter – 'normaler' is. Een andere normatief ongewone staat van onderlinge afhankelijkheid is een situatie waarin relatief jonge ouders (vooral vaders) op hun jongvolwassen kinderen (vooral hun zonen) moeten steunen.

Bijdragen aan het onderzoek naar ouder-kind relaties

Dit boek had tot doel om meer inzicht te verkrijgen in ouder-kind relaties door nieuwe uitdagingen te formuleren en empirisch te onderzoeken. In deze laatste paragraaf zal ik mijn belangrijkste bijdragen aan het onderzoek naar ouder-kind relaties samenvatten.

Ten eerste, de design van de gegevensreeksen die ik heb gebruikt maakte het mogelijk om unieke analyses uit te voeren. Zo konden de eerste 15 levensjaren van Nederlandse kinderen in een tijdsvenster van 150 jaar (HSN/NKPS) worden laten zien. De NKPS maakte het verder mogelijk om een zeer brede leeftijdsgroep van relaties tussen generaties te analyseren (leeftijd van de kinderen: 18-79 jaar oud) van willekeurig geselecteerde ouder-kind relaties. Dit vergrootte de generaliseerbaarheid van mijn bevindingen. Ten slotte gaf de NKPS de mogelijkheid om het volledige broer/zus netwerk in de analyses te betrekken.

Ten tweede, deze studie nuanceert het debat rond de teloorgang van het kerngezin als je kijkt naar de relatie tussen kinderen en hun ouders tijdens de kinderjaren. Ik onderschrijf dat onder invloed van moderniseringsprocessen de mate van onderlinge afhankelijkheid tussen ouders en hun kinderen is verminderd. En er is ook veel te zeggen voor het verschijnsel *'family decline'*: een groot aantal studies heeft de negatieve implicaties van het uiteenvallen van families op het leven van kinderen tijdens hun jeugd en in volwassenheid overtuigend aangetoond. Echter, het lange termijn perspectief op het opgroeien van kinderen liet zien dat instabiliteit geen nieuw fenomeen is in Westerse families. Het leven in families was en is steeds in beweging. Als onderzoekers en politici iedere nieuwe ontwikkeling in families vergelijken met de situatie na de Tweede Wereldoorlog, de hoogtijdagen van het kerngezin, dan verheffen we deze uitzonderlijke periode in de geschiedenis van het Westerse gezins- en familieleven onterecht tot norm. De huidige complexiteit binnen gezinnen is zelfs in sommige opzichten goed vergelijkbaar met die in de 19de eeuw, hoewel de oorzaken verschillend zijn.

Ten derde nuanceert mijn studie het idee dat de relatie tussen volwassen kinderen en hun ouders in de hedendaagse maatschappij aan betekenis in zou boeten. Een probleem in het debat rond de vermeende teloorgang van gezinnen en families is dat families met huishoudens worden verward, terwijl het belang van familiebanden tussen verschillende huishoudens wordt genegeerd. Voor hedendaagse ouders en kinderen worden wederzijdse investeringen binnen de familie juist gestimuleerd doordat economische onafhankelijkheid, marktactiviteiten, en vriendschapsrelaties nooit een echt substituut voor de emotionele kwaliteiten van de ouder-kind relatie kunnen zijn. Met andere woorden, de relatie tussen ouders en kinderen wordt vandaag de dag niet samengesmeed door een duidelijk scenario –

namelijk: slechts door materiële of normatieve argumenten bepaald – maar is in grote mate gebaseerd op vrije keuze, gevoel, en vriendschap. De overgrote meerderheid van de ouders en de volwassen kinderen hebben regelmatig contact, steunen elkaar emotioneel, en hebben een relatie van uitstekende kwaliteit.

Ten vierde heb ik ook het belang van het broer/zus netwerk laten zien. Ouder-kind relaties worden niet alleen door hun individuele en relationele omstandigheden, maar ook door die van andere ouder-kind relaties binnen dezelfde familie beïnvloed. Volgende rondes van de NKPS zullen helpen meer licht te werpen op de samenhang tussen veranderingen in de levensloop (verhuizen, relatievorming) van het ene kind en de effecten voor de relatie tussen de ouder en het andere kind.

Ten vijfde helpt mijn studie om beter te begrijpen wat vandaag de relatie tussen volwassen kinderen en hun ouders bindt en ondermijnt. Ik heb aangetoond dat solidariteit en conflict niet noodzakelijkerwijs elkaars tegengestelden zijn. Vandaag de dag wisselen volwassen kinderen en hun ouders vaak steun uit, terwijl dezelfde ouders en kinderen eveneens conflicten hebben. Bovendien werd aangetoond dat het vruchtbaar is om meerdere dimensies van zowel solidariteit en conflict tegelijkertijd te analyseren. Rekening houdend met die veelzijdigheid van ouder-kind banden, ontvouwde de gebruikte analysemethode (latente klassenanalyse) een heldere typering van relaties.

Ten zesde nuanceert mijn studie het recente wetenschappelijke discours over ambivalentie tussen generaties. Ik meen dat het goed is om ambivalentie in tegengestelde gedragingen (solidariteit en conflict) uit te drukken. Gedragingen als uitingen van solidariteit en conflict laten zien wat ouders en kinderen werkelijk doen. Dit is goed te combineren met hun subjectieve evaluatie van de relatiekwaliteit. Ik vond dat frequent contact niet met uitstekende kwaliteit kan worden gelijkgesteld, in tegenstelling tot wat vaak wordt beweerd. Voor sommige relaties bevordert geografische afstand juist emotionele nabijheid. Voor anderen kan het wekelijks of frequenter contact en de vele steunuitwisselingen 'teveel van het goede' zijn. Ik heb eveneens aangetoond dat het combineren van ambivalentie en relatiekwaliteit beter helpt te begrijpen hoe en waarom sommige relaties sterk en stabiel zijn, terwijl andere juist onder druk staan. Ik vond dat ambivalentie niet per definitie samengaat met een slechte relatiekwaliteit. Relaties tussen ouders en kinderen die elkaar wekelijks of vaker zien zijn van betere kwaliteit als beiden voldoende uitwegen hebben om zich *ook* aan de relatie te kunnen ontrekken.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Ruben van Gaalen was born in Harderwijk, the Netherlands on February 20, 1969. He studied Sociology at Bremen University (Germany) of which he obtained his Master's degree in 2002. During his studies in Bremen he worked four years as a student-assistant at the Special Collaborative Center 186 '*Status Passages and Risks in the Life Course*' in project B6 '*Household Dynamics and Social Inequality in an International Comparison*' (project leaders: Hans-Peter Blossfeld/ Sonja Drobnič). Within this project he finished his Master's Thesis with the title: '*First parenthood and the division of household labor in West Germany between 1984 and 1999*' using longitudinal data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP). In September 2002 he started to work as a PhD candidate at the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) in the Hague (The Netherlands), affiliated to the Interuniversity Center for Social Science Theory and Methodology (ICS) of the Sociology Department of Utrecht University. He co-organized the first Dutch Demography Day (2005). Since October 2006 he is employed as statistical researcher at Statistic Netherlands (SN) in Voorburg, working with the Social Statistical Database (SSD).

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