Intergenerational Solidarity and Conflict

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TWO SCENARIOS: CONFLICT AND AUTONOMY

Judging from certain mass media two representations of intergenerational relations between adult children and parents seem to emerge: They are either in a state of permanent unsolvable conflict, or they have as little contacts as possible. The cover of an issue of the German magazine "Spiegel-Special" on generations is a good example of the first assumption. "Generations in Conflict" appears in large letters, and "Young against Old—Youth Mania and Hatred of the Old—Crime: Beating instead of Caring." These catchwords are adorned with a photo of a sinister old man looking down at a young blond man wearing a dog collar who is shouting up at him.

The other image the media convey about relationships between generations is one of alienation and drifting apart. This refers to, for example, young, flexible individualists who change jobs frequently in this time of globalisation and flexibilization and thereby bit by bit, job for job, continue to move further away from their parents. These are people who simply neither have the time nor inclination to spend time with their parents. Eventually the other person is not only out of sight but out of mind. At the same time, however, this seems to be in keeping with the interests of some parents. In any case, publishers seek to attract customers with books such as the following: "Still at home at Thirty: How one gets rid of children before it's too late" (Meinert, 1996). For the children, corresponding titles are available: "Leave me alone, Mother! Mothers who are always interfering and what adult children can do about it" (Vollmer, 1995); "I'm not a child anymore: What adult children are afraid to say— what parents do not want to hear (Collange, 1993); "Still having problems with parents: Adult children stuck between conforming and rebelling" (Dobrick, 1991).

Both scenarios, conflict and autonomy, are not unfamiliar to sociologists. There are, for example, a number of publications about (separation) conflicts in adolescence as well as about conflicts occurring during the care of older parents, which at worst can even lead to maltreatment (e.g., Schütze, 1989; Pillemer and Suitor, 1992). At the same time the assumption of the structural isolation of the parental couple refers to the drifting apart of generations as soon as the children have left their parents' house: "Hence, when the children of a couple have become independent through marriage and occupational status the parental couple is left without attachment to any continuous kinship group" (Parsons, 1942: 615f.). This is also reflected in the following statement: "Children have an enduring sense of diffuse obligation

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as long as their parents live; but enduring solidarity, if solidarity means close bonds of affection and intimacy, will probably not last long because modern society emphasises independence between the generations" (Blau, 1973: 50).

This paper seeks to explore to what extent the two images of intergenerational relations are in keeping with reality. The goal is less to report on specific, individual intergenerational relations but rather to give a general view or family relations between generations among adults in the Federal Republic of Germany, on the whole. Firstly, the paper will deal with intergenerational solidarity—that is the image of the drifting-apart of generations: To what extent do family generations who no longer live in the same household still maintain relationships marked by solidarity? Do they see and call each other regularly? Do they feel emotionally connected? Do they help each other, whether by means of financial or instrumental support (associational, affectual, and functional solidarity)?

Furthermore, the paper focuses on problematic aspects of intergenerational relations, concentrating on conflicts: To what extent are current intergenerational relations among adults marked by pronounced conflicts? Are conflicts mainly occurring between family generations or between other people? How do conflicts manifest themselves and what consequences do they have? The latter question refers specifically to connections between solidarity and conflict.
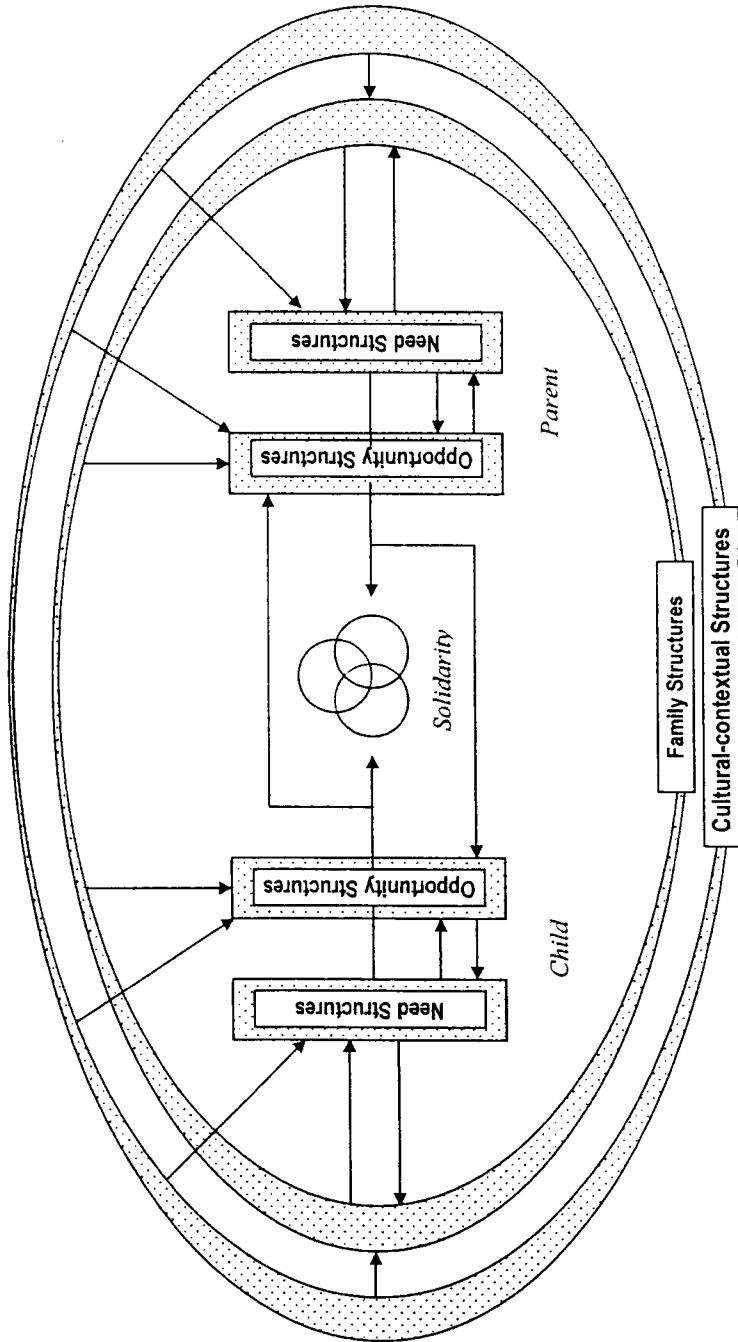
Elaborated generational research involves investigating determinants for solidarity and conflict. Hence, central findings on the basis of multivariate empirical analyses will be documented in brief. These are based on a heuristic model of intergenerational solidarity that differentiates between four groups of factors, i.e., opportunity, need, family and cultural – contextual structures.

A Model of Intergenerational Solidarity

Intergenerational solidarity comprises, on the one hand, specific behaviour and, on the other hand, a feeling of belonging and close connection between family generations. It involves a series of facets that can be classified into three dimensions, namely the functional, affectual, and associational dimensions of solidarity. Functional solidarity comprises support and that is, simply said, the giving and taking of money, time and space. The associational dimension refers to common activities. The affectual dimension includes emotional attitudes such as the emotional closeness of the relation (Szydlik, 2000, 2001; partly based on Lawton, Silverstein, and Bengtson, 1994).

Figure 1 shows a theoretical model of intergenerational solidarity. The goal is to find explanations for more or less pronounced intergenerational solidarity, whereby the three circles symbolize the functional, associational, and affectual dimensions of solidarity. The diverse conditional factors for solidarity can be classified into four groups, namely opportunity, need, family and cultural-contextual structures. Hereby, three levels of analysis are distinguished, namely individual, family and society. Intergenerational relations are principally dyadic, i.e., that means two people are involved (in this case: parent and child) each with specific opportunity and need structures. This relationship is embedded in a family, and

Figure 1: A Theoretical Model of Intergenerational Solidarity

beyond that, a societal context. Between the groups of factors there are influences and dependencies (represented by arrows; Szydlik, 2000: 43ff).

Opportunity structures reflect opportunities or resources for solidarity. They enable, promote, hinder or prevent social interaction. For example, geographical distance might influence emotional bonds between parents and adult children, who do not live in the same household anymore. *Need structures* indicate the need for solidarity. The needs can be of a financial nature (i.e., during education, unemployment or insufficient financial savings in old age), they can stem from health problems (be it a short-term or long-term illness, or even requiring lifelong help or care), or they can be emotional needs (i.e., for companionship, attention, understanding, recognition, advice, consolation). *Family structures* include, in principle, the whole history of socialisation including earlier family events, in part those in early childhood. For example, growing up with a divorced parent may have consequences for intergenerational solidarity in adult life. Family structures include in particular also the expected and actual role allocation with regard to holding the family together. Regarding financial transfers (including inheritances), for example, the existence and number of siblings as competitors may play a crucial role in the likelihood of receiving money (wealth) from the parents. Also, specific family norms should not be neglected. *Cultural-contextual structures* represent societal conditions within which intergenerational relations develop. These include conditions of the social, economic and tax system (e.g., inheritance tax), the welfare state, and the labour and housing market, as well as the specific rules and norms of certain institutions and groups (the corresponding arrows in Figure 1 indicate a possible interplay with rules and norms on the family level). One of the most important features of cultural-contextual structures is influences of political and economic regimes.

Intergenerational Conflict

Recently, several empirical investigations about intergenerational solidarity have been conducted. Conflict research is still lagging behind. There is a number of publications about conflicts between parents and adolescent children (e.g., Schütze, 1989; Oswald and Boll, 1992, Papastefanou, 1992) as well as intergenerational conflicts in old age (e.g., Pillemer and Suitor, 1992; Halpern, 1994; Clarke, Preston, Raksin, and Bengtson, 1999). Both fields of research deal, therefore, with the margins of the life course and both focus on generations living together, i.e., either in the period before the children leave home or in the period after the elderly parents are taken in (for example, when they need care). This focus makes sense if one assumes that conflicts mainly arise when different generations live in the same household (see e.g., Suitor and Pillemer, 1991). Additionally, particular problems like separation processes of youths and young adults or the immense burden of caring for family members make intergenerational relations even more difficult. The phrases "Inner closeness through outer distance" (Tartler, 1961) or "Intimacy with distance" (Rosenmayr and Köckeis, 1961) point out that intergenerational solidarity is less in danger from conflicts when one no longer lives within the same four walls (incidentally this is also supported by the everyday observation that adult children and parents who live far away from each other really treasure shorter Christmas visits, but see old lines of conflict break out with longer periods of stay).

There is, however, very little known about intergenerational conflicts in middle age. This applies above all to the intergenerational relations of adult children and parents who no

longer live with each other—or do not yet live with each other again. A reason for this might be due to the above-mentioned assumption of the structural isolation of the parental couple. If no relevant relationship between family generations continues after the children have left their parents' home, conflict might not occur. Representative information about intergenerational conflict between adults in the Federal Republic of Germany is also in short supply due to lack of data. However, the Ageing Survey offers information on interpersonal conflicts. A first analysis was published by Filipp and Boll (1998). The investigation presented here differs in terms of the focus of the paper, the design of the investigation and the statistical methods employed. Before presenting the results, however, the relation between generational conflict, generational solidarity, and generational autonomy will be briefly discussed.

Conflict, Solidarity, Autonomy

One might assume that there are three distinct types of intergenerational relations: namely solidarity, conflict and autonomy. This would imply that intergenerational relations are either characterised by solidarity or conflict (see Höpflinger, 1999: 31ff). Nonetheless, in general solidarity and conflict should not be seen as opposites:

1. Relations marked by solidarity are not characterised in principle by the absence of conflicts. One should not idealise intergenerational solidarity. All dimensions of intergenerational solidarity provide examples of potential burden and conflict. Relations between adult children and parents, for example, can be too close when parents hold on too strongly and hinder the personal development of their children (Stierlin, 1976). Financial contributions are also often an expression of power relations between the generations and are occasionally seen even as a kind of bribery, so that some transfer recipients would rather even do without these donations if only they could (Kotlikoff and Morris, 1989; Lüscher and Pajung-Bilger, 1998: 55). Future inheritances can likewise be used as instruments of power by the testator. Instrumental support, e.g., care in old age, is often accompanied by great burden. Coresidence of parents and adult children in the same household is also not always a pure, unspoilt pleasure for both parties.

2. Conflicts between family generations do not necessarily indicate the absence of intergenerational solidarity. Those being in conflict with each other, as painful as it may be, can on the other hand still provide support, maintain contact with the other person and feel emotionally closely connected. In fact, conflicts can even be caused by solidarity (i.e.,, care). This naturally does not rule out that conflicts can go along with great burden and clearly negative consequences for those involved. Occasionally, the conflicts are so pronounced and irreconcilable that in the end the termination of the intergenerational relationship is advisable.

3. Conflicts can be destructive or constructive, they can arise sporadically, episodically or constantly (see Canary, Cupach, and Messman, 1995). They can range from differences in opinion about less important issues for those involved, or more or less loud arguments about central issues, all the way to physical attacks. That means that, according to the kind of conflict and the way in which the argument is carried out, there are risks, but also opportunities. Respectful arguments between family members offer,

for example, the chance to clarify different opinions and wishes and thereby keep the relationship alive, shape and develop it. Such respectful arguments between family members are then a component and opportunity for active, lively relationships. People who argue with each other also still show an interest in each other and the wish to continue the relationship. Stierlin (1976: 203f.) speaks, for example, of a "gentle fight" which can lead to a "mutual liberation in the context of generational conflict."

Thus, the opposite of solidarity is not conflict, but rather generational autonomy as a consequence of ending the relationship. Solidarity and conflict are at right angles to each other. In both cases there is an imagined continuum between two poles on which the individual intergenerational relations can be plotted. On the one hand, it spans from permanently complete solidarity (when all facets of all three dimensions of solidarity are always present) through broken solidarity (e.g., when at present there is no functional solidarity; however, associational and affectual solidarity exist) all the way to complete generational autonomy. On the other hand, there is a continuum between the poles 'permanently destructive conflict' and 'complete harmony'. Thus, conflicts appear within intergenerational solidarity, whereby intergenerational relations which are marked by solidarity can be differentiated according to the degree of conflict. One could refer to 'consensual solidarity' on the one hand and 'conflictual solidarity' on the other.

DATA

The findings presented here are based on two data sets, namely primarily on the German Ageing Survey, and the German Socio-Economic Panel. The German Ageing Survey was carried out by the Research Group Ageing and the Life Course (Berlin) and the Research Group Psychogerontology (Nijmegen) in cooperation with infa-Social Research (Bonn) on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women, and Youth (the author takes responsibility for the findings documented here). The nation-wide representative sample of almost 5,000 people covers the 40 to 85 years old Germans in private households (see Kohli and Künemund, 2000; Kohli, Künemund, Motel, and Szydlik, 2000a). There are very few parents under 40 years of age with adult children, and therefore the Ageing Survey covers the largest share of parent-child relations among adults. A third of the respondents were drawn from East Germany, two-thirds from West Germany.

The German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP; see Schupp and Wagner, 2002) is a wideranging representative, longitudinal study of private households in Germany, starting in 1984 with 12,290 respondents in the 'former' Federal Republic of Germany (including West- Berlin). Since then, the same persons and households have been interviewed once every year. In 1990, the survey was extended to include the territory of the former GDR (4,453 respondents). Further data collection increased the number of cases considerably (over 20,000 respondents).

The three dimensions of *intergenerational solidarity* in Figure 2 are based on the following questions: (1) "How close do you feel connected with...today? Very close/close/medium less close/not close at all." (2) "How often are you in contact with... (e.g., visits, letters or telephone conversations)? Every day/several times a week/once a week/one to three times a month/several times per year/less often/never." (3) "Many people do give others gifts in the form of money or material goods. This applies, for example, to parents, children, grandchildren

and other relatives, but also to friends or acquaintances. How is it in your case? Have you given money, larger gifts in the form of material goods to anybody or have you regularly supported anybody financially over the past twelve months?" "Have you helped anybody, who is not living in this household, during the past twelve months with household work (e.g., cleaning, smaller repairs or shopping), apart from the care activities already mentioned and independent of activities which are related to your employment or part-time employment?" (received monetary transfers and help were asked for in a similar way). "I would now like to find out more about your activities. Do you privately look after or supervise children, who are not yours, including, for example, your grandchildren or children of neighbours, friends or acquaintances? (please tick the appropriate)."

Due to the range of possible *conflicts*, when conducting an empirical investigation it is necessary to explicate the utilized concept. The Ageing Survey focuses on pronounced conflicts that clearly go beyond insignificant differences of opinion about unimportant topics and episodic minor quarrelling (Figure 3). The respondents were asked: "There are time and again situations in life in which one's view of important issues is completely different from that of people one is close to, which causes conflicts. Does this apply to you? Is there ` a person or are there people in your life with whom you are in conflict with?"

RESULTS

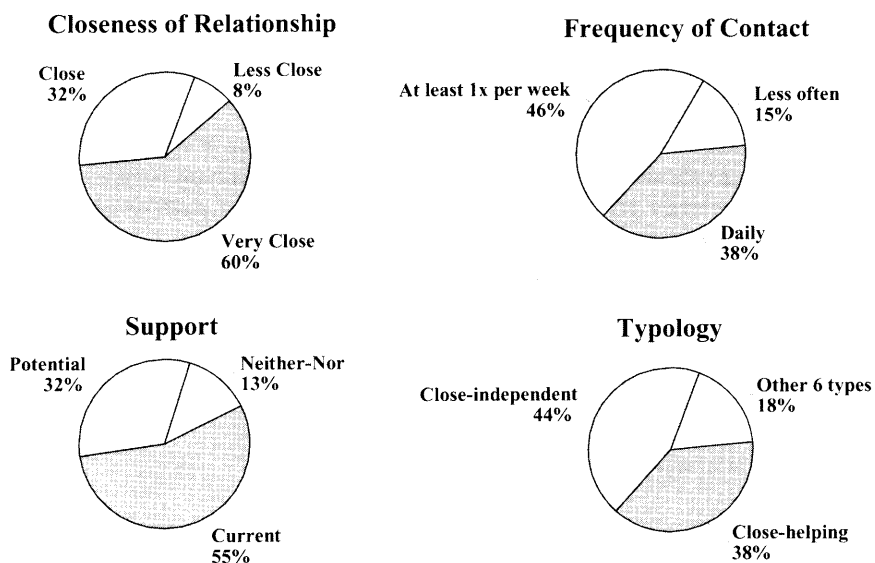*Affectual, Associational, and Functional Solidarity*

Before turning to intergenerational solidarity among adults, it is necessary to put it in its broader context. There are at least two factors to be emphasised, namely the existence of family generations and the geographical distance from one another. Ninety-three (93) percent of the respondents of the German Ageing Survey have currently at least one living relative of another generation (grandparents, parents, children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren). Three-quarters belong to a family consisting of at least three generations, and a fifth even belong to a four-generation family. Seventy-two (72) percent have at least one adult child, and 61 percent have an adult child living outside the household.

Most adult children and parents do not live far from one another. Nearly a third of the (40 to 85-year-old) parents with adult children live with at least one of them in the same household; four out of ten live under the same roof, that is, in the same house. The following results refer only to adult children and parents who no longer live in the same household: In the case of nine out of ten 40 to 85-year-old parents with adult children outside the household the spatial distance is a maximum of two hours. More than six out of ten live in the same town. On the basis of the Socio-economic Panel one finds that 80 percent live a maximum of one hour away from each other (here, the under 40 and over 85-year-old people are also included; Szydlik, 2000).

However, one must concede that the existence of family generations and their geographical proximity does not say anything about intergenerational solidarity itself. They simply represent a potential for it, if one assumes, for example, that those living more closely (could) see and help each other more frequently. For this reason, geographical proximity is not shown in Figure 1. But the closeness of the relation, the frequency of contact, and support

are in fact aspects of intergenerational solidarity. They are indices for affectual, associational, and functional solidarity.

Table 2
Intergenerational Solidarity

Closeness of Relationship

Close 32%
Less Close 8%
Very Close 60%

Frequency of Contact

At least 1x per week 46%
Less often 15%
Daily 38%

Support

Potential 32%
Neither-Nor 13%
Current 55%

Typology

Close-independent 44%
Other 6 types 18%
Close-helping 38%

Data Base: German Ageing-Survey. Weighted Results, own calculations.

Closeness of Relation (affectual solidarity)

Figure 2 shows that nine out of ten parents speak of an at least close emotional bond, and this applies to an adult child with whom they no longer live together (this is also in accordance with results based on the Socio-economic Panel). Affectual solidarity of the family generations is clearly very strong. Three out of five parents even report a very close emotional bond with their adult child. Further analyses show that lineage descendants display a much greater emotional closeness than other relatives. This also underlines the immense significance of generational lineage with regard to private solidarity.

Frequency of Contact (associational solidarity)

Eighty-five (85) percent see or speak to each other at least once a week. As such, associational solidarity is very strong, too. Four out of ten parents have daily contact with their adult children, even when they are not living with them.

Support (functional solidarity)

Parents and adult children are at each other's disposal with a wealth of support. This ranges from previous, current and future monetary and material gifts as well as assistance in the

household and care giving all the way to emotional support. Fifty-five (55) percent of the 40 to 85-year-old Germans with adult children outside the household are connected with them currently through monetary transfers, help within the household or through care of grandchildren. This looks at merely a selection of various kinds of possible intergenerational support, whereby it should be added that only the last twelve months were taken into account here. Earlier financial and instrumental support was not taken into consideration, nor was future support, not to mention inheritances (Szydlik, 2004; Schupp and Szydlik, 2004).

Further results on the basis of the German Ageing Survey verify that a fourth of the 40 to 85-year-old adult children have helped their parents or parents-in-law within the household in the past twelve months, even when they do not live together. Thirty percent of the parents with adult children living outside the household have given monetary transfers to them in the last twelve months, i.e., they have given money, larger material gifts or regular financial support. If one had asked about a longer period of time, a considerable higher proportion would have been revealed. Furthermore, private transfers take place above all between parents and children. Other relatives as well as unrelated people have a much smaller chance of receiving transfers. They also provide support much less often (Motel and Szydlik, 1999; Kohli, Künemund, Motel, and Szydlik, 2000b).

Eighty-seven (87) percent of the respondents are currently or potentially connected with their adult children living outside the household through a range of different forms of support. In the case of a third (32 percent) there are no current transfers or assistance. But when they are asked who they could turn to should they need help—whether it be in the household, be it advice about important personal decisions, consolation or encouragement, or be it even living together in the case of greater need of help—they name their adult children. It must also be pointed out that this is only a selection, which means, that even higher rates can be expected if one would include more kinds of support.

Typology (affectual, associational, and functional solidarity)

By means of a typology, the three dimensions of solidarity can be looked at in summary (see Silverstein et al., 1994). Thereby it is examined whether the three solidarity forms occur at the same time, for example, some generations may feel closely connected, but do not keep close contact or provide help simultaneously. More than four out of five parent-child relations are of the close-helping or the close-independent type. In the first case, there is affectual as well as associational and current functional solidarity. In the second case, the generations feel closely connected with one another and they are also in frequent contact, but they have not supported each other by monetary transfers or help in the household in the last twelve months. This does not mean, however, that help was refused, but rather there is reason to believe that the generations are not presently dependent on assistance. If this situation changes, a strong basis for intergenerational support exists.

Determinants of Intergenerational Solidarity

To what extent do different people (groups of people) have different intergenerational relations? To answer this question, I have carried out a series of empirical analyses on the

basis of the Ageing Survey and the Socio-economic Panel. In line with the overview character of this article, a large number of tables about specific aspects of solidarity are not listed here. Instead, a few central, summarised results on the basis of the theoretical solidarity model are presented.

Opportunity Structures

For example, the multivariate analyses verify that especially geographical distance is an important determinant for affectual intergenerational solidarity. The further the parents and adult children live from each other, the less emotionally connected they feel. The family generations who permanently live far from each other show a more fleeting—and particularly less close—relationship over time. For current monetary transfers from parents to their adult children, the most significant determinant is the resources of the parents. With income and wealth the possibility of the parents giving their adult children transfers increases considerably: He who has more, gives more.

Need Structures

The analyses show, for example, that adult children who are unemployed or completing their education are more likely to receive current financial contributions from their parents: He who needs more, gets more. At the same time, a higher standard of living is accompanied by closer intergenerational relations. This finding supports the idea that, with sufficient resources, the intergenerational relationship is not burdened by financial dependence. Furthermore, transfers—or just the availability of them—can strengthen the relationship.

Family Structures

The analyses based on the Socio-economic Panel reveal, for example, that growing up in a one-parent family—usually with the mother—has a strong influence on later intergenerational relations in adult age. Those who grow up with a divorced mother have a considerably less close relationship with their father for life—though divorces, on the whole, do not result in a less close relationship with the mother. Also, the analyses consistently prove the 'kinkeeper' function of women in the family. Mothers and daughters have, in principle, closer intergenerational relations and, as such, hold the family together. At the same time the intergenerational relationship between women proves to be particularly stable and close over time.
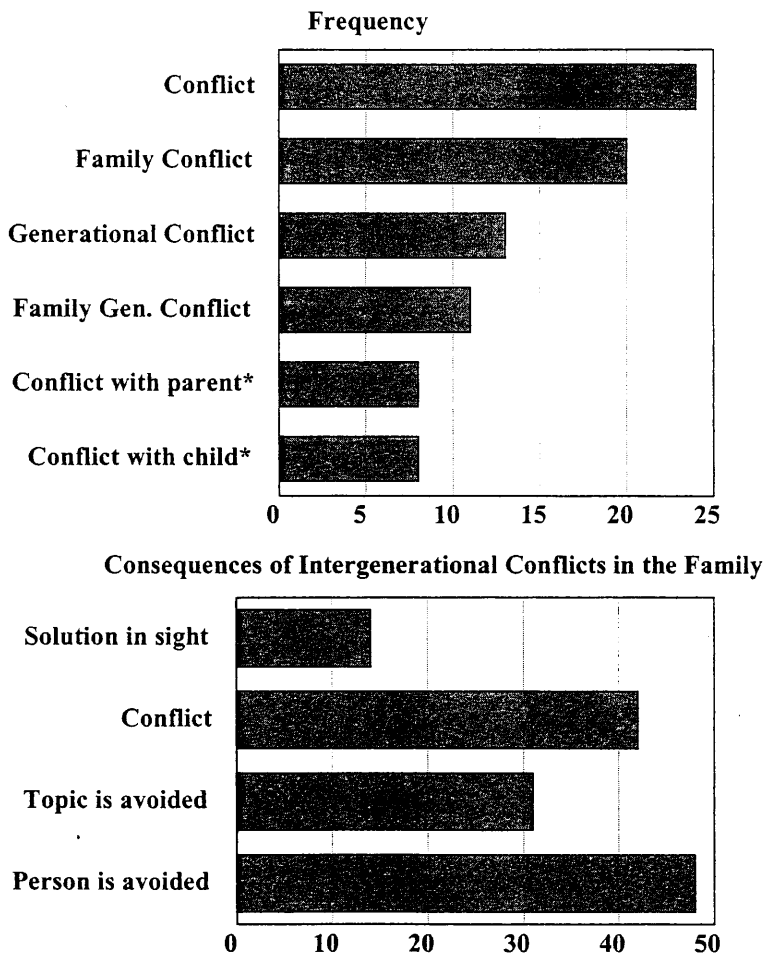
Cultural-contextual Structures

For example, the different conditions in East and West Germany have consequences for intergenerational relations. Comparing with West Germans, East Germans have generally closer intergenerational relations. Moreover, specific cultural-contextual structures have a different impact for East and West Germans. For example, religious affiliation plays less of a role for East Germans than for West Germans, even when one considers the higher number of people who claim to be non-denominational. A further finding refers to differences between East and West Germans with respect to functional solidarity. East German adult children receive significantly smaller transfers, and above all they are also at a great disadvantage in

terms of inheritances—which essentially stem from the (wealth of) parents (see Szydlik, 2004).

Frequency of Conflict

To what extent is the relationship between adult children and parents marked by conflicts? What burdens can be identified and how do the generations cope with them? And naturally: What consequences for intergenerational solidarity can be determined?

Figure 3
Intergenerational Conflict

Frequency

Consequences of Intergenerational Conflicts in the Family

Data Base: German Ageing-Survey. Weighted results, own calculations.
*: Respondents with parents/adult children outside the household.

The upper part of Figure 3 shows the frequency of relationships with conflicts. Almost one quarter of the respondents agree with the corresponding statement in the questionnaire (see the Data chapter). At the same time the Figure shows that most conflicts worth mentioning take place within the family. At any rate, a fifth report conflicts with family members. In addition to this it was asked if this person is roughly the same age as the respondent or if s he is significantly younger or older. An eighth express such intergenerational conflicts, whereby a good tenth report intergenerational conflicts within the family. The two following bars refer only to those respondents with adult children or parents outside the household. In each case eight percent are in conflict with considerably older or significantly younger members of the family.

Thus, considerable conflicts with other people arise only with a minority of the 40 to 85 yearolds. However, when they are involved in conflicts, it is in most cases conflicts within the family. Conflicts are first and foremost family conflicts—approximately half are fought out within the same age group (e.g., as partner conflicts); the other half are intergenerational conflicts within the family. The great majority of intergenerational relations are, however, not marked by pronounced conflicts—which incidentally was also confirmed by US American results (Bengtson, 1996: 285f.). Inevitably, minor everyday disputes are not ruled out, here. However, for most of the respondents sporadic controversies are not worth mentioning.

How are intergenerational conflicts expressed, and above all: what consequences do they have? Are they perceived as "gentle fights," or is there ultimately the danger of the termination of the intergenerational relation—not to mention pronounced solidarity?

Only every seventh person with intergenerational conflicts states that the two parties are currently working on a solution. Two out of five of those involved in intergenerational conflicts within the family see no end to the conflict. They quarrel quite often or they talk about the issue, but they are unable to find a solution. A third ignores the controversial issue or simply cannot talk about it, although they would like to. However, almost half of those in conflict avoid the other person or break off contact.

Determinants of Conflict

In order to gain further insight into intergenerational conflicts, I have carried out a series of multivariate analyses with regard to intergenerational conflicts with descendants or (grand)parents outside the same household (again, due to the overview character of this paper, these analyses are not documented in detail). Who has conflicts with relatives of another generation? Some of the results read as follows:

According to *opportunity structures*, one could assume that in particular those relationships are marked by conflicts in which the two parties see and talk to each other frequently and beyond that feel closely connected with each other. Even conflicts require opportunities, and without an emotional bond with the other person, one will, hypothetically, have fewer arguments with this person. The analyses cannot definitively reject this hypothesis because no explicit information about the origins of the conflict is available, which had apparently reached a considerable importance at the time of the survey. The results are, however, not suitable to support the hypothesis. On the contrary, the results presented in Figure 3 are

impressively confirmed: Intergenerational conflicts are accompanied by less frequent contact and a weaker emotional closeness between the generations. Respondents with little contact and weak emotional bonds with a parent or adult child outside the household experience considerably more frequent intergenerational conflicts. In comparison with the other variables, the strongest effects are produced here.

The results presented in Figure 3 refer to an apparent paradox: On the one hand, conflicts arise primarily between family members, i.e., controversies are for the most part carried out with people who are close. On the other hand, conflicts often go along with an avoidance of the person in question. According to interaction theory, conflict means "dual enforcement of independence and autonomy of action in the mutual dealing of two subjects. (...) Conflict is, therefore, dual or reciprocal action against the will of the other when two people deal with each other; it is interaction in the sense of a series of alternating 'acts of contravention' and therefore 'estrangement'" (Tyrell, 1976: 258f.). A conflict with another person presupposes a bond with this person in order to then be able to act in relation—in opposition—to each other. This condition particularly applies to family generations. Nevertheless, when differentiating the generations according to frequency of contact and emotional closeness, one recognises the 'estrangement' that goes along with pronounced conflicts. On the basis of the analyses it cannot completely be ruled out that one is more likely to be in conflict with family generations one meets less often and with whom one feels less close. However, the opposite is much more likely: pronounced conflicts lead to a weakening of the relationship. This is also suggested by the results presented in Figure 3.

Need structures influence not only intergenerational solidarity, but also intergenerational conflict. Financial difficulties and health problems can put a lot of strain on intergenerational relations. Looking at parent-child relations no significant coefficients come to light. However, adult children with debts are twice as likely to be in conflict with the older generations within the family, this is in particular with the parents. The same applies to the receipt of intergenerational transfers. Conflicts arise especially with 40 to 85-year-olds who have received financial contributions in the last twelve months from parents outside the household. This supports the hypothesis that dependence on financial help from the parents often goes along with controversy.

At the same time, the analyses show that health problems of adult children increase the probability of conflict with parents. There is reason to believe that this result is due to strains health problems put on intergenerational relations.

Divorced or separated parents have more frequent conflicts with their offspring. It is up to future analyses to determine whether this finding mainly stems from long-term consequences of problematic marriages ending in separation, from particular pressure due to higher demands of divorcees for emotional support, or if it stems from other factors that contribute both to more frequent conflicts with partners and with children.

Family structures are important, too. The expected and actual role allocation between women and men is particularly influential. While parents do not report different frequency of conflict with their daughters or sons, women do have more frequent conflicts with their parents. Since the Ageing Survey deals with the 40 to 85-year-old population, the parents of the

respondents are of a correspondingly advanced age. Daughters are more likely to hold the family together than sons. They are more likely to fulfil the 'kinkeeper' function and are also more oftenmade responsible for looking after the parents, for helping them in the household, or even for caring for them. As such, it is obvious that conflicts with older parents are more likely to occur with daughters, who are more burdened with family work, than with the less-burdened sons.

Also, *cultural-contextual structures* are not to be neglected. The best example is the different intergenerational relations of East and West Germans. East German parents speak considerably less often of conflicts with their offspring. Thus, the immense transformation consequences do not lead to general conflicts between family generations. The especially close intergenerational relations in the German Democratic Republic might even protect East German families from negative consequences of new strains, which would confirm earlier results (Szydlik, 1996).

Lastly, the probability of conflict increases considerably with the level of education. For the parent-child relations such an effect can not be proved, but adult children with advancedsecondary or university education are considerably more likely to have conflicts with their parents than children with a basic education. Research on intergenerational conflicts has not yet reached the point that one could already employ empirically tested hypotheses on that issue. Possibly, besides the greater spatial distance between better educated generations (BMFSFJ 2006: 138), factors such as lesser financial dependence of better-off children on current and future contributions from parents also play a role—with corresponding effects on intergenerational contact, communication and support.

CONCLUSION

The relationships between adult children and parents who no longer live in the same household provide the acid test for the existence and extent of intergenerational solidarity within the family. Adult children and parents are connected with each other in many ways even when they do not live together anymore. Intergenerational relations are marked by pronounced affectual, associational and functional solidarity. In view of hypotheses such as crises and disintegration of the family, a drifting-apart of generations and pronounced intergenerational conflicts, these are very surprising results. There is a stark contradiction between the images of generations provided by certain mass media and those in reality.

Intergenerational solidarity applies to all age groups. It is apparent in the relationships between parents and young adult children who have just moved out, and likewise in the relationships between older children and their parents. Intergenerational solidarity is life long. An overall statement would be: Life-long solidarity with close distance.

However, despite all solidarity one should avoid the temptation to idealize intergenerational relations. Intergenerational solidarity is not in principle and general an indication of a 'good' family. To only emphasize emotional closeness, frequent contact and pronounced support between the generations, is to paint an incomplete picture. Pronounced conflicts are relatively seldom, but nevertheless they should not be neglected. On the whole, consensual solidarity prevails. Conflictual solidarity can often lead, however, to a drifting apart of generations.

Pronounced conflicts are more of a risk than an opportunity for intergenerational solidarity. They are rather destructive than constructive. Very few of these pronounced conflicts can be solved by those involved. Instead, there is the danger of terminating the relationship. However, one should not treat solidarity and conflict as opposites. In fact, they may go hand in hand, as the terms 'conflictual solidarity' and 'consensual solidarity' suggest.

For elaborated generational research, it is not sufficient to simply refer to the general existence of problematic aspects alongside solidarity. Beyond that, it is above all necessary to investigate the determinants and processes of intergenerational relations and therewith to identify the specific relationships of certain groups of people. For this approach, the solidarity model provides a theoretical basis. On the basis of this model a number of important factors have been identified. Opportunity, need, family and cultural-contextual structures influence intergenerational solidarity to a great extent. On the individual level, opportunities or resources for solidarity as well as financial, health-related and emotional needs determine affectual, associational and functional solidarity. On the meso-level of the family, even early events (e.g., a divorce of parents with young children) play a crucial role for family relations in later life—but the current family factors (like the number of siblings and family norms) should be neglected neither. As individuals (dyads) are embedded in family structures, both are influenced by social conditions on the macro-level. For example, state regulations create frameworks in which individuals and families live their private relations.

In recent literature on generations, the term 'ambivalence' has been discussed, "when polarized simultaneous emotions, thoughts, social relations, and structures that are considered relevant for the constitution of individual or collective identities are (or can be) interpreted as temporarily or even permanently irreconcilable" (Lüscher, 2002: 587, see Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry, and Silverstein 2002; Katz, Lowenstein, Phillips, and Daatland, 2004). In fact, ambivalence and solidarity are not contradictory, but they can be related to one another. Intergenerational relations include contradictions, dilemmas and ambivalences, which can be identified via the proposed solidarity model. On the one hand, there are ambivalences *within* the four determinant groups, e.g., the fundamental ambivalence within need structures between intergenerational attachment and autonomy, or on the level of cultural-contextual structures, ambivalences between contradictory societal norms of independence and support. On the other hand, ambivalences *between* the solidarity dimensions can be identified, e.g., contradictions between emotional needs of intergenerational contact and opportunity due to job-related geographical distance, or between individual need vs. familial and societal norms regarding care of frail parents. Thus, in this respect, intergenerational solidarity can be the result of a productive engagement with those fundamental ambivalences.

Additionally, the solidarity model indicates that intergenerational relations are not only an issue within family sociology in a narrow sense. Influences occur in both directions: On the one hand, family relations influence societies at large. In this perspective one important research stream applies to connections between generations and inequality. Private solidarity of family members has strong consequences for social inequality. Parents want to help their children in every way. However, parents with larger resources are more able to do so. They support their children throughout their life—and even after their death in the form of large inheritances. This means that social inequality is reproduced, and even increased, by private intergenerational solidarity.

On the other hand, societal conditions create a framework for intergenerational relations within the family. Thus, in regard to future research, influences of welfare state regulations on private solidarity seem to be especially promising. One of the most interesting questions is whether the welfare state hinders or enables family members to support and help each other. This is not only an academic question, but promises valuable insights for social policy. A further investigation of the influences of various cultural-contextual structures on intergenerational relations in the family offers great potential.

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