

“The interpersonal is political”: Understanding the sociological ambivalence created in parent and adult offspring cohabiting relationships

Sherree Dawn Halliwell¹  | George Karl Ackers² 

¹School of Humanities and Communication, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia

²School of Education and Sociology, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, Hampshire, UK

Correspondence

Sherree Dawn Halliwell, University of Southern Queensland, West Street, Darling Heights, Toowoomba, Queensland 4350, Australia.

Email: sherree.halliwell@usq.edu.au

Abstract

Objective: This article considers the ambivalence generated in familial cohabitation where adult offspring have never left or have returned to live with their parents.

Background: Ambivalence is commonly used in psychology to describe contradictory emotions at the interpersonal level.

Method: A thematically analyzed ethnographic study of eight cohabitating families living in North Wales, in the United Kingdom, explored both generations' perspectives on cohabitation.

Results: Although our study found evidence of ambivalence at the interpersonal level, we suggest that this was drawn from a structural contradiction, namely, that although cohabitation was the result of structural issues, such as graduate underemployment and the affordable housing crisis, societal values labeled it the personal consequence of a failed adulthood. This caused these families feelings of shame and guilt that created a barrier blocking the interpersonal negotiations needed to develop more positive living arrangements and family roles. The generational contradictions in values of self, family, and society produced irreconcilable personal and political tensions.

Conclusion: This study concludes that two changes are needed to better negotiate ambivalence in family cohabitation. First, the social narrative that responsabilizes young adults for their failure to attain financial and residential independence needs to be challenged. Second, to address current structural contradictions, the social contract on the provision for family social care needs political renegotiation.

Implications: Building on the concept of *sociological ambivalence*, this article suggests that studies of ambivalence need to take a critical perspective that questions the structural forces that produce and constrain interpersonal familial relationships.

KEYWORDS

cohabitation, emerging adulthood, ethnography, family, intergenerational ambivalence

INTRODUCTION

The title of this article was inspired by the classic feminist statement “The Personal Is Political,” drawn from the title of Hanisch’s (2000; originally published in 1969) paper on women’s liberation. Hanisch uses “political” (p. 1) in the broad sense of the word, as having to do with power relationships, not the narrow sense of electoral politics. Hanisch’s definition of political seems very relevant to our study. We argue that cohabiting for the families in our study was framed by the current political contexts and that social and generational inequality shaped power within the families’ interpersonal relationships. We conducted an ethnographic study of eight cohabitating families living in North Wales, United Kingdom, where adult offspring had never left or had returned to live in the family home. This type of cohabitation has been pejoratively labeled as *failure to launch*, where leaving the family home is delayed, or *boomerang*, where adult offspring return home after a period of independent living (see Burn & Szoeki, 2016). We use the term *adult offspring* to avoid the infantilizing inference of *children* as meaning preadulthood.

We also find the terms *failure to launch* and *boomerang* problematic and only use these terms critically and to locate the article in the current cohabitation literature with the aim of challenging these discourses. This study found that cohabitation caused growing ambivalence between parents and adult offspring. To understand the ambivalence the cohabiting families experienced, we build on Lüscher and Hoff’s (2013) dynamic model of intergenerational ambivalence. The families in our study seemed to be trapped at a stage Lüscher and Hoff called the “captivation” stage, with cohabitation the underlying cause of continued negative feelings that could not “be expressed adequately in words” (p. 44).

However, this ambivalence was not just the product of a failure to communicate misaligned generational values. Instead, ambivalence arose from a structural contradiction, and although cohabitation had resulted from structural issues such as the housing and “underemployment” crises, societal values still labeled it the personal consequence of failed adulthood. Therefore, in line with Connidis (2015; Connidis & McMullin, 2002), we propose that studies of ambivalence be framed by a critical theory perspective that foregrounds the structural forces that produce and constrain interpersonal familial relationships. Further, we advance Connidis’s (2015; Connidis & McMullin, 2002) conceptualization of sociological ambivalence as a means to understand how constraints created by social structures and the economic disparity of family members generated ambivalence in this study.

First, we discuss the literature on intergenerational ambivalence to suggest, in line with Connidis (2015), that people’s feelings of intergenerational ambivalence are not only personal but also embody contradictions and inequalities at a structural level. Next, we outline the study’s intergenerational ethnography and thematic data analysis. The study’s themes suggest that both generations were held captive by the social values that economic and residential independence were prerequisites of a successful adulthood and that individuals of each generation were responsible for attaining this status.

The decline of council housing (i.e., government-provided social housing) alongside the growth of poorly paid and insecure employment means that for cohabiting family relationships to be affirming there is a need for change at both the structural and interpersonal levels. On the structural level, we suggest the social contract on the provision of generational care and housing undergo a profound renegotiation. On the interpersonal level, we suggest that, although sociological ambivalence cannot be resolved by cohabiting families alone, if families are able to

collectively engage with ambivalence as a structural problem, this sense of solidarity could reduce interpersonal conflict. The development of this solidarity could be a tool for resolving family ambivalence used in family counseling or third-party arbitration services.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the turn of the century, ambivalence has become a major concept used to understand family relationships (Connidis, 2015; Lüscher & Hoff, 2013). Ambivalence was conceived as a bridging concept to close the divide between research on family solidarity and family conflict (Lusher & Hoff, 2013). Although overcoming this divide, ambivalence seems to have opened a new divide between sociological and psychological analyses. This disciplinary divide is conceptually antithetical; as Connidis (2015) argues, ambivalence was conceived with a “sociological imagination” to understand family relationships in “the interplay of individuals and society, of biography and history, of self and world” (Wright Mills, 1959, p. 4).

However, psychological studies frequently apply ambivalence as an exclusively psychological concept and give little acknowledgment to how people’s interpersonal tensions are interrelated with structural issues, cultural expectations, and historical contexts (Connidis, 2015). The psychological focus on exclusively interpersonal factors is derived from Lüscher and Pillemer’s (1998) original framework that presented ambivalence as occurring on different structural and interpersonal levels. This framework referred to ambivalence at the level of social structures as contradictions in institutional or economic resources, that is, as differences in social norms or the level of capital that family members possess, although at the subject level, the framework referred to contradictions manifest in people’s “cognitions, emotions and motivations” (Lusher & Hoff, 2013, p. 42). Lüscher and Pillemer maintain that, even though this framework presents ambivalence in terms of levels, it was intended that studies engage with ambivalence as a multilevel concept.

However, Connidis and McMullin (2002) argue Lüscher and Pillemer’s (1998) model also provided a limited understanding of structural ambivalence as solely “contradictions in social roles, values, norms, and beliefs” between individuals. Connidis and McMullin suggest that Lüscher and Pillemer’s model overlooks two key features of structural ambivalence. First, it masks how “power imbalances” affect different family members and shape family conflicts (Connidis & McMullin, 2002, p. 563). Second, it ignores the impact that conflicting structural social expectations have on different family members. To capture the impact that conflicting structural social expectations have, Connidis and McMullin suggest that ambivalence needs to be reframed as a dialectic relationship between agency and structure, evoking Morgan’s (1985) suggestion:

The question is not one of either individual strain or structural pressures but a dialectical combination of both, such that the wider structural tensions reach into, shape and condition the individual responses, which in their turn structure and shape the domestic situation. (p. 231)

This suggests the source of ambivalence can emerge from sociopolitical structures and inequalities. As Connidis and McMullin (2002) suggest: “Role conflict and overload result because of contradictions and paradoxes that are embedded within social structures” (p. 562). In this manner, although families may find better means to negotiate their issues, major structural problems may produce barriers that cannot be repaired through interpersonal dialogue alone. To develop a subjective and structurally joined-up concept of ambivalence, Connidis and McMullin embed ambivalence in a critical theory framework. Their critical theory framework suggests that four sociological principles should inform studies of ambivalence. First, akin to

wider society, the family should be viewed as the product of social inequalities and “structured social relations” that bestow different members of the family different levels of power. Finch’s (1989) study illustrates how structured social relations impacted women when male privilege permitted men to focus exclusively on paid employment, while women remained the default primary caregivers for aging parents. The research of Oakley (1974) and Cox (2020) also shows how the power and status of family members are shaped by patriarchy when the familial division of labor attributes paid work a much higher status than domestic work and care. This normally privileges men, but in the type of cohabiting relationships we looked at in our study, power and status can take on a generational dynamic because parents provide money and own the house (Cox, 2020).

The second premise of Connidis and McMullin’s (2002) critical theory framework is that people try to negotiate the impacts of social structures by using agency to exert control over their lives. However, agency should not be reduced to free choice because self-interest is often mediated by structural expectations. For example, McQuaid et al.’s (2019) study of cohabitation suggests that a strong sense of familial duty compelled parents to help their offspring and sacrifice their own interests. This sense of duty made cohabitation a “choice-less choice” because the social construction of parenthood left no alternative to providing residential support (McQuaid et al., 2019, p. 5). The third and fourth premises of Connidis and McMullin’s critical theory framework are that families should be understood as produced and negotiated through continued interactions, and that family dynamics are the product of conflicting interests. Therefore, familial conflict should not be understood as “episodic and unpredictable but as a patterned feature of relationships” (Connidis & McMullin, 2002, p. 559). Connidis and McMullin’s (2002) critical theory framework enables a sociological definition of ambivalence that understands ambivalence as “socially structured contradictions made manifest in interaction” (p. 559).

Connidis and McMullin’s (2002) critical theory is not the only framework that has been proposed to overcome the “unfortunate dichotomy” between a structural and a subjective definition of ambivalence. Lüscher and Hoff (2013) also aimed to do this by generating a new typology, with ambivalence presented as a cycle. This “dynamic model” (Lüscher & Hoff, 2013, p. 43) challenges a linear interpretation of ambivalence in terms of levels and suggests that psychological and structural dynamics happen in an evolving interplay. (See Figure 1.)

This cycle proposes four ways in which psychological and institutional dimensions coalesce to produce and deal with ambivalence (Lüscher & Hoff, 2013). First, “solidarity” reflects when ambivalence is “preserved consensually,” whereby on the surface families “express common feelings” but repress or conceal any difficult issues. In these cases, ambivalence becomes “latent” without disappearing. Second, “captivation” reflects families that have a continued “struggle over ambivalence which often cannot be expressed adequately in words” (Lüscher & Hoff, 2013, p. 44). In this context, relationships are maintained reluctantly out of necessity. Third, “atomization” characterizes conflicts over ambivalence that result from family separation and estrangement. Fourth, “emancipation” reflects the efforts made by families to overcome ambivalence by acknowledging it and negotiating “new forms of common action” (Lüscher & Hoff, 2013, p. 44).

Lüscher and Hoff’s (2013) dynamic model suggests that personal and institutional (structural) dimensions generate ambivalence differently. Lüscher (2002) suggests that when differing personality traits in parents and children produce conflictual beliefs or actions, this generates ambivalence in the personal dimension, whereas when family members’ commitment or resistance to family traditions, values, and common ties comes into conflict, ambivalence is generated in the institutional dimension. Thus, Lüscher (2002) situates the institutional dimension at the level of “concrete social system such as the family” (p. 588).

Lüscher (2002) suggests that tensions between personal and institutional dimensions are experienced in different ways by family members based on their levels of structural capital and

Figure 3.1: Intergenerational ambivalences: a dynamic model

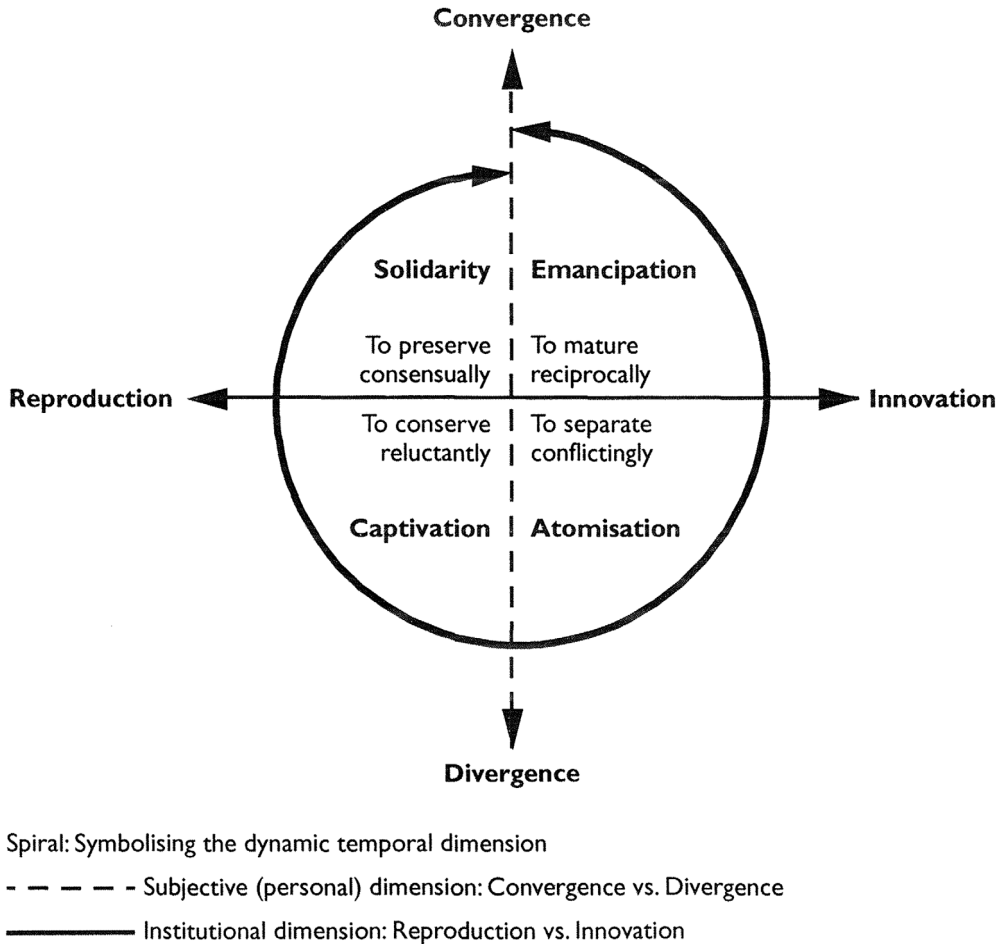


FIGURE 1 *Intergenerational ambivalences—A dynamic model*

Note. From “Intergenerational ambivalence: Beyond solidarity and conflict,” by K. Lüscher and A. Hoff, in I. Albert and D. Ferring (Eds.), *Intergenerational Relations* (p. 43), 2013, Policy Press

power. For example, when conflict arises from misalignment in personal values, beliefs, and behaviors, the more powerful generation can use their institutional power and capital to hold subjugated family members in “captivation” and “to assert claims of one family member against another” (Lüscher, 2002, p. 589). Letiecq et al. (2008) develop on this understanding to characterize captivation as occurring “when family members assert the primacy of the family institution over the claims of individual family members and conserve the institution with reluctance” (p. 6). Rappoport and Lowenstein’s (2007) research connects older parent–child relationships with Lüscher and Hoff’s (2013) structural and subjective dimensions of ambivalence by mobilizing the notions of guilt and shame. They suggest: “Shame is well-suited for representing structural ambivalence, which has to do with social norms, although guilt is better suited for representing subjective ambivalence, which has to do mainly with personal feelings and thoughts” (Rappoport & Lowenstein, 2007, p. 14). Although they distinguish guilt and shame as emotional responses, they suggest these are part of an interrelationship that mutually informs people’s experiences of ambivalence on personal and structural levels.

Although both Connidis and McMullin's (2002) critical theory framework and Lüscher and Hoff's (2013) dynamic model seem to agree that more engagement with structural forces is needed to better understand ambivalence, they seem to disagree about how structural forces should be framed and understood. Connidis (2015) suggests that Lüscher and Hoff's model's "focus on interpersonal ties limits its application at the meso and macro levels" (p. 81). Thus, this model does not consider how ambivalence can be built into social structures as an inherent by-product of social inequalities, and this in turn is experienced at the family (meso) level as a conflict between the family's negotiation of personal and societal expectations.

On the other hand, Lüscher and Hoff (2013) have criticized sociological ambivalence, suggesting that "the arena for resolving ambivalences cannot be restricted to the macro-level of social structures" (p. 49). However, Connidis and McMullin's (2002) conceptualization of sociological ambivalence is not restricted to the macrolevel. Instead, Connidis and McMullin maintain that although sociological ambivalence cannot always be resolved at an interpersonal level, if families collectively acknowledge their "shared situation of ambivalence" (p. 565) and the structural causes that have created it, then interpersonal ambivalence will be reduced. In fact, Lüscher et al. (2010) seem to support this idea with their development of the concept of "intergenerational justice" (p. 114), which suggests generational policies need to be developed that redistribute resources between generations. The key principle of intergenerational justice is this: "On the one hand, such policy should guarantee the development of a responsible and community-oriented personality; on the other, it should assure social development as a whole" (Lüscher et al., 2010, p. 114). To evaluate Lüscher and Hoff's and Connidis and McMullin's conceptual discussion, we present its data on ambivalence in intergenerational cohabitation, which is contextualized in the next section.

INTERGENERATIONAL COHABITATION

In 2018, in the United Kingdom about one-quarter (3.4 million) of 20- to 34-year-olds lived with their parents. This reflected an increase of 24% between 2008 and 2018 (Office for National Statistics, 2018). The cohabitation of adult offspring is a global phenomenon that has increased under conditions of economic austerity. However, the cohabitation of adult offspring is understood differently across national and cultural contexts (see Koslow & Booth, 2012; Newman, 2012; Tsekeris et al., 2017). Katherine Newman's (2012) cross-national study spanning Denmark, Italy, Japan, Spain, Sweden, and the United States found that local cultural norms, economic factors, and social policies influenced both the incidence of intergenerational cohabitation and the extent to which it is considered socially acceptable. This is further reflected in Otters and Hollander (2015), which suggests that in southern Europe, the practice of offspring staying at home until marriage is more normalized because the extended family is the primary institution of social security. Yet even in these more favorable contexts, adult offspring are still infantilized with labels such as *bamboccioni* (big babies; Otters & Hollander, 2015, p. 40). However, in the United Kingdom, offspring are given even more pejorative names, such as KIPPERS, or kids in parents' pockets eroding retirement savings (p. 40).

Kahn et al. (2013) suggest that, although adult offspring are responsabilized for cohabitation and portrayed by the media as fecklessly enjoying the financial benefits of living at home, the real reason that cohabitation has increased is the long-term decline in social welfare that has produced very restrictive housing and unemployment benefits. This generational disadvantage is further exacerbated as the percentage of people who are classified as "underemployed" or who work on "zero-hour contracts" (both casual employment arrangements where employers neither guarantee hours nor provide permanent employee benefits) more than doubled between 2008 and 2018, a trend that disproportionately affects young adults (Office for National Statistics, 2018).

The University of Essex Understanding Society UK household longitudinal survey estimated that, in 2019, 8.4 million people in England were currently living in unaffordable, insecure, or unsuitable homes, with 2.5 million of these inhabitants living in “hidden households” that they could not afford to move out of, such as adult offspring living with parents and people living with an ex-partner (University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2020). O’Higgins (2012) argues that the neoliberal retrenchment of the welfare state has resulted in the responsibility for provision of family social care being transferred from the state back to the family, with family members increasingly shouldering this residential burden. Newman (2012) argues that “the generations that have been lucky enough to buy into an affordable housing market, that enjoyed stable jobs for decades, find they must open their arms (and houses) to receive these economic refugees back into the fold” (para. 20). However, Newman’s research also suggests that this residential burden falling on families is not inevitable: Denmark and Sweden illustrate that countries with comprehensive welfare systems and policies that provide generous student subsidies, healthcare, and affordable housing for young adults have bucked the global intergenerational cohabitation trend.

Burn and Szoeki (2016) suggest that this cohabitation has been categorized in two ways: *failure to launch*, where leaving the family home is delayed, or *boomeranging*, where adults return home after a period of independent living (p. 9). Both types of cohabitation, as their names suggest, are defined as a failure to achieve a successful adulthood in terms of social norms. Schwartz (1999) suggests that the emphasis on cohabitation being the result of personal failure is derived from the 1960s generation’s belief that as individuals they had constructed their lives through self-sufficiency, financial responsibility, and a strong work ethic. Consequently, this generation views subsequent generations’ outcomes as largely a product of individual agency.

Burn and Szoeki (2016) suggest that because the portrayal of adult offspring as personally failing is seldom challenged socially, parents experience feelings of deep personal disappointment. Lewis et al. (2016) similarly found that parents often regard intergenerational cohabitation more negatively than their adult offspring do. Burn and Szoeki (2016) comment that, in cultures where this type of cohabitation is usual, structural conflicts are far less pronounced. In such cultures, co-residence can offer significant benefits to parents as “buffers against loneliness, particularly if the parents are providers of care rather than recipients” (p. 11). Burn and Szoeki also report that adult offspring “who leave home later are more likely to have regular contact with and provide practical help to their parents than those who leave earlier” (p. 11). Thus, Burn and Szoeki’s research suggests cohabiting family relationships are negatively informed by structural issues, a topic our research explores in the next section.

CURRENT STUDY

We conducted a 12-month ethnography study on the lived experience of cohabitating families in which adult offspring had never left or had returned to live in the family home. All families that participated in this study lived on the island of Anglesey in Wales. In fact, of the parents, only one had ever lived off Anglesey. Of the adult offspring, the three Failure to Launch offspring had never lived off Anglesey, although all five Boomerang offspring had lived off Anglesey before coming back to live with their parents. The 2011 census indicates this lack of geographical mobility is common: 68% of the residents of the Isle of Anglesey were born in Wales, with a further 29% born in the United Kingdom. Fifty-seven percent of residents speak Welsh, making Anglesey a local authority in the United Kingdom that has the second highest Welsh-speaking population. Alongside Anglesey’s lack of cultural or ethnic diversity, the island

TABLE 1 Research participants

| Family | Parent 1 | Parent 2 | Adult offspring | |
|----------|-------------------------------|-------------------|---|--|
| Ballard | Sheila | | Tim | |
| FL | Age 60s | | Age 40s | |
| | PA | | Retail manager (single, never left family home, 23 years adult cohabiting) | |
| Davies | Bill | Shannon | Lynne | |
| B | Age 50s | Age 50s | Age 20s | |
| | Skilled laborer | Doctor | Assistant manager (married, returned home from England to save for deposit, 6 months adult cohabiting) | |
| Glover | David | Rita | Allan | |
| B | Age 50s | Age 50s | Age 30s | |
| | Driver | Teacher | Skilled laborer (single, returned home from Swansea for work opportunity, 2 years adult cohabiting) | |
| Jackson | Brenda | | Tess | |
| B | Age 60s | | Age 30s | |
| | Retired business professional | | Retail assistant (divorced, returned home from England after breakup of marriage, 2 years adult cohabiting) | |
| Jones | Gwilliam | Mary | Tracey | |
| B | Age 60s | Age 60s | Age 30s | |
| | Retired accountant | Retired homemaker | Unemployed medical professional (divorced, returned home from England after breakup of relationship, 4 years adult cohabiting) | |
| Thomas | Bernie | Lynn | Leanne | |
| B | Age 50s | Age 50s | Age 20s | |
| | Laborer | Medic | Unemployed legal professional (single, returned home from England after breakup of relationship and unable to find professional work, 3 years adult cohabiting) | |
| Thompson | Jonathan | Julie | Lauren | |
| FL | Age 50s | Age 50s | Age 20s | |
| | Skilled laborer | Social worker | Unemployed graduate (single, 3 years adult cohabiting) | |
| Wright | David | Liz | Tom | Tim |
| FL | Age 60s | Age 60s | Age 20s | Age 20s |
| | Retired laborer | Retired homemaker | Laborer (single, never left family home 3 years adult cohabiting) | Laborer (single, never left family home, 5 years adult cohabiting) |

Note: Participant names have been anonymized. FL = Failure to Launch; B = Boomerang.

is relatively economically deprived, with only 28% of occupations at a professional level and the median weekly pay around £19 less than the Welsh median. For this reason, caution should be observed in generalizing our findings to wider populations such as multicultural cities where lived experience may be different.

METHOD

To recruit the research sample, we used a homogeneous purposive technique (see Patton, 2001). We applied this purposive technique because all families needed to have at least one adult offspring residing in the family home. Recruitment was facilitated through contacts known to the research team, including at the Women's Institute and in Anglesey community groups. These organizations played no active role in recruiting participants but were used only to situate requests for participants. The study subjects comprised 23 participants from eight cohabiting households, as shown in Table 1. Respondents are identified by pseudonym, and we categorized participants into the following groups: parents (P), offspring labeled as Failure to Launch (FL), and offspring labeled as Boomerang (B).

The study's ethnographic approach included collecting data from participants' photo journals and life stories and observing family interactions to focus several lenses on a single social experience. We invited participants to keep a 5-day photo journal of intergenerational cohabitation that would be discussed during one-on-one in-depth interviews. In creating their photo journals, participants were encouraged to capture representations of "family time." Qualitative interviews were guided by both the participants' photo journals and their biographic narratives. This allowed the respondents as much space as possible to tell their story and ascribe meaning to their experiences and beliefs (Riessman, 2008). The use of photo journals also encouraged exploration of challenging and taken-for-granted topics (Balomenou & Garrod, 2016).

How the qualitative interviews were conducted was influenced by Wengraf's (2004) Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method, with each interview opening with a question designed to invite the participant to share their story in their own words. We also recorded families' cohabitation via kitchen entrance observations (Ehn & Löfgren, 2006). We made these observations by participating in everyday life routines with the families to gain insight into the systemic issues of how family life is organized. These observations took place during situations when family interaction was the norm, such as family dinners, shared chores, and hobbies. Insights from observations were noted in a field notebook. To analyze interviews and observations, we performed a thematic analysis that followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis.

RESULTS

This section presents the study's four themes. The first theme was entitled "Cohabitation as failed adulthood and failed retirement" to reflect both generations' framing of cohabitation as an unwanted living arrangement that had resulted from failed adulthood and that produced failed retirement. The second theme, "Individual responsibility: a generational understanding," considered how parents constructed their generational outcomes and those of their offspring as being the result of personal agency. However, the adult offspring's position of financial dependence meant they felt unable to challenge their parents' authority over generational values and family history.

The economic disparity between parents and adult offspring also structured how both generations defined familial support, as reflected in the third theme: "Unacknowledged and unequal familial care." This unacknowledged familial care seemed to make it very difficult for parents and adult offspring to challenge ambivalence because they could not develop a relationship of reciprocal intergenerational care. This unequal relationship also effected the fourth theme: "Our house, our rules: regression to parent-child relations," which showed that the consequence of not renegotiating house rules was a protracted parent-child relationship in which a lack of constructive and focused negotiations led to unresolved resentments.

These themes, taken together, present a picture of family ambivalence characterized by the captivation stage (Lüscher & Hoff, 2013). However, these themes suggest this captivation was

not the result of contradictions of interpersonal values, nor could it be resolved at an interpersonal level alone. Although parents and adult offspring performed care for each other, the structural context acted as a barrier to acknowledging this interpersonal love and kindness. Thus, these families' ambivalence was constructed on structural values and was maintained by structural inequalities (Connidis & McMullin, 2002).

Theme 1: Cohabitation as failed adulthood and failed retirement

This theme defined how both generations framed cohabitation as an unwanted living arrangement resulting from adult offspring's "failed adulthood." This theme built on Rappoport and Lowenstein's (2007) concepts of guilt and shame. The parents felt social shame because of their adult offspring's inability to live up to the social norms of independent adulthood, and they experienced personal guilt at the ambivalence they felt about giving their children residential support while wishing they could enjoy their aspiration for more freedom in retirement. Adult offspring felt social shame for not living up to the social norms of adulthood because they had been told that their failed adulthood was the consequence of their poor life decisions and agentic actions as individuals. The adult offspring also felt guilt at being a burden on their parents' plans and causing them social shame.

Cohabitation was viewed negatively as a living arrangement from its inception because parents and adult offspring universally agreed this marked a period in life that they had planned and envisioned differently. For the parents, cohabitation caused conflict between social expectations and personal aspirations. On one hand, they felt familial obligation to provide their adult offspring accommodation and assist them financially. On the other, they felt cohabitating blocked them from pursuing the privileges of retirement that their generation had come to expect, such as travel. The weight of social expectation and the parental sense of duty made accepting intergenerational cohabitation a "choice-less choice" (McQuaid et al., 2019, p. 5).

Although most adult offspring had no other options, this did not stop parents from expressing their disappointment at this living arrangement. Rita Glover, for example, described Alan's homecoming as "the prodigal son returns, minus the prodigy." (Participant names are pseudonyms.) Most parents also expressed disappointment in what they defined as their adult offspring's failure to attain normal markers of adult status, such as employment and residential independence. As Mary, one of the parents, said: "We got a key to the door when we turned 21, but that meant you were now an adult and you were supposed to have your own front door, not still live with mum and dad." Thus, parents clearly equated adulthood with economic and residential independence. The evaluation that cohabitation was the result of failed adulthood was at least in part internalized by most adult offspring.

Most adult offspring acknowledged they would be in financial difficulty and possibly homeless without their parents' support. Alan, the son of Rita, expressed that living with his parents was a "last resort." Tracey Jones and Leanne Thomas also reflected internalizing the idea that cohabitation was a personal failure when lamenting their inability to secure professional work after the breakup of their respective marriages. Leanne explained: "I was only a temp, so I couldn't afford a place on my own. They wouldn't lease to someone like me anyway." The Boomerang offspring in our sample cited factors like divorce and unemployment (and underemployment in unskilled or casual work) as triggering cohabitation; Failure to Launch offspring cited their inability to amass sufficient economic resources as stopping them from living independently.

Although adult offspring saw their personal deficiencies as a major factor, they also suggested the socioeconomic climate had contributed to their need for familial cohabitation. For example, Lauren expressed frustration at her housing and graduate employment options: "I want to move out and get on my way, but there's no graduate jobs on Anglesey, definitely none

that pay well enough to afford rent on my own place and bills and everything.” In contrast, parents rarely acknowledged the effect of structural factors; instead, parents responsabilized their adult offspring for squandering opportunities such as a university education because they felt this meant the younger generation should have found financial success easier to attain than they had. This parental perspective was expressed most clearly by Brenda: “She [Tess, her daughter] spent three years there [at university] and what good did it do her? Working in a supermarket on pay half what her father gets, and he left school at 14.” However, Brenda attributed her daughter’s employment outcomes to personal shortcomings, not the decline in well-paid graduate employment. She maintained, “When I was growing up, nobody wanted O-levels [an academic qualification]. Now university people have all the top jobs, and you get much better pay if you have a degree.”

Cohabitation was not only framed as a failure in adult offspring’s independence. This living arrangement was also seen as causing a failure for parents’ retirement plans, because supporting their adult offspring produced an unexpected financial burden. Mary’s photo journal contained entries chronicling mutually enjoyed activities with her daughter, such as cooking, reading, and attending the local “stitch and bitch” (women’s needlework) group. However, Mary’s fondness for her daughter’s company was tempered by the limitations this placed on her plans:

I don’t know when she’s going to leave; she may be with us ’til she’s 40 or 50! Who knows? Until her situation is sorted out we can’t really plan. Don’t get me wrong, I love to have her here with us, but it does throw a spanner in the works. We’re thinking of downsizing and going overseas traveling. We don’t need a four-bedroom place, but we can’t just get an apartment ’cause there won’t be room for her and her dog. So it’s just wait and see. (Mary Jones, B)

Mary’s need to justify herself and say “I love to have” her daughter living with her reflected a common sense of guilt for parents at feeling their adult offspring were an obstacle to their desire for travel and adventure. Adult offspring seemed aware that their parents found their residence an inconvenience, with most stating that this support stretched their parents’ duty of care.

I do understand that I am sort of imposing, putting them out by being here. When we all flew the nest they probably thought their job was done and they’d have the house to themselves. Now I’m back and they’ve got me to keep and less money spare for traveling and things they should be doing in their retirement. I do feel guilty, and I’m lucky they are in a position to help because I don’t know what I’d have done without them. (Tracey Jones, B)

The adult offspring commonly expressed guilt at feeling they were a financial burden on their parents. Lauren suggested: “I’m a disappointment to them. After them forking out so much for university, I know they expected me to get a good job, not just fall back on the dole.” Lauren also voiced feeling “ashamed” that she has “failed to make [her parents] proud” but “insanely grateful” for their continuing financial support. Adult offspring also expressed that cohabitation caused a mixture of ambivalent feelings. As Alan pointed out, cohabitation allowed him time to make choices without the “panic of needing a job ... just to pay the rent in whatever shitty place you’ve ended up.”

Thus, adult offspring felt ambivalent about cohabitation because they saw it as their best or only option while simultaneously feeling ashamed for their economic and residential dependency on their parents. Adult offspring’s shame (Rappoport & Lowenstein, 2007) seemed structurally informed in two ways: First, they felt that their lack of economic independence caused them to fall short of social norms; second, the structural lack of affordable housing made cohabitation their only option. However, as developed in the next theme, parents discounted

the impact of structural factors in disrupting adult offspring's transition to independent adulthood.

Theme 2: Individual responsibility: A generational understanding

This notion of individual responsibility links to Schwartz's (1999) suggestion that the 1960s generation places emphasis on values of self-sufficiency and resilience. This demonstrates how parents fashioned a narrative in which their generational outcomes and those of their adult offspring were expressed as being the result of personal agency devoid of structural context. This agentic narrative allowed parents to justify, retrospectively, their outcomes as the result of hard work and frugal living alongside justifying the outcomes of the adult offspring as the consequences of laziness and materialism. The power that parents had over family narratives reflects Connidis and McMullin's (2002) proposal that the structural power and status that different family members possess directly informs which family narratives are given legitimacy.

Parents believed that upward social mobility was a standard trajectory for young people today, as typified by Gwilliam: "You get a job after graduating university, maybe start off with long hours and a small apartment, but then you earn your stripes, and you get promoted and over time you can afford a mortgage for a nice family home." As reflected by Gwilliam, current structural barriers such as restrictive social welfare and housing (O'Higgins, 2012; Qian, 2012) were ignored or discounted by parents. Instead, the inability of adult offspring to achieve well-paid employment and affordable accommodation was framed as a product of them not taking personal responsibility for their lives, a point made most directly by Sheila Ballard: "The younger generation is immune to hard work. All those values that our parents instilled in us have been lost in this generation because they don't have enough commitment, hard work and determination to see things through." This accusation caused ambivalence between the generations; for example, Tess Jackson said that she felt this conception of the current employment ladder was outdated and unrealistic:

You don't get a council house for starters and rent in the city is so high that it's impossible to save up enough for a mortgage. I could be working ten years before I've saved up enough for a deposit on a two-bed apartment in London. ... And you can't just walk into a job like you could when they started out. I've done hundreds of applications for grad jobs and I can't get my foot in the door. They think if you start as a secretary you can work up to CEO, but it doesn't work like that anymore. (Tess Jackson, B)

Akin to Kahn et al.'s (2013) suggestion that cohabitation is commonly reduced to personal fecklessness, most parents regaled views of a generational decline in individual discipline and an increase in a culture of entitlement. For example, Gwilliam suggested that his generation's comparative affluence was the consequence of personal savings:

We've invested carefully and paid off the mortgage as soon as we could. ... We brought up Tracey as a saver but since getting married and moving out she's stopped thinking about her future and she takes no care of the pennies. She's got all these debts and nothing to show for it after 5 years of work. (Gwilliam Jones, B)

Conflicting generational attitudes on saving and debt were a common source of inter-generational tension. Lynne Davies explained that her credit card and student loan were a major source of conflict because her parents rejected that these debts were a necessity for establishing oneself on the career and property ladder today. Thus, contradictions in "social-structural expectations" of the two generations generated sociological ambivalence

(Connidis & McMullin, 2002), and adult offspring felt frustrated. The contradictions of these social-structural expectations was not lost on Lynne:

I had to pay rent in Manchester that was four times their mortgage, so of course I have credit cards and student loans. ... It's taken me 5 years of saving to have enough for a deposit for a small terraced. If I used that money to pay off debts, I'd never get on the property ladder. (Lynne Davies, B)

Parents commonly contrasted their historically responsible approach to home finance to the comparatively frivolous materialism of the younger generation. Parents' perspectives often led to open condemnation; for example, Rita openly labeled her son "a disappointment" and directly compared him to her daughter, whom she was "extremely proud of" for living independently in London as a consultant. Rita felt it was her son's "wasteful" consumption that had resulted in his need for cohabiting:

Allan has to have the latest iPhone. His old one's only a year old and he's just spent another 500 pound on a new one because it takes better selfie photos. I think it's wasteful. He's hardly got a penny to his name and instead of setting himself up, all his money goes on tat. (Rita Glover, B)

Overall parents felt that if their children had taken personal responsibility for success by developing an ethic of hard work, resilience in the face of hardship, and parsimonious financial management, then they would have achieved upward social mobility. Thus, parents attributed adult offspring's failed independence to personal rather than social deficiency, and furthermore regarded this as preventable, had the younger generation adopted the values of their parents' generation. The parents' arguments of generational moral decline responsabilized adult offspring on a personal and a generational level. The parents attributed the younger generation's outcomes to the subject level, seeing these outcomes as manifestations of their adult offspring's "cognitions, emotions and motivations" (Lüscher & Hoff, 2013, p. 42) and not reflective of social structures. However, the adult offspring's position of dependence seemed to leave them unable to challenge the narratives of their parents. Thus, the conflict and power reflected in these family narratives illustrate sociological ambivalence because it was "the contradictions inherent in social relations" (Connidis & McMullin, 2002, p. 185) that produced ambivalence at an interpersonal level, a point built on in the next theme.

Theme 3: Unacknowledged and unequal familial care

This theme reflected that a financial ideology structured how parents and adult offspring defined and prioritized familial support. This theme developed on Cox's (1997) suggestion that in "patriarchal societies" (p. 63) domestic work and care work are given a much lower status than paid work. This had a generational impact in this study, because the unpaid support provided by adult offspring went unacknowledged as care and parents viewed it as insufficient payment for the residential and economic support they provided their offspring. The result of these acts of love and care going unacknowledged was that families seemed unable to move beyond a captivation stage to an emancipation stage, where "new forms of common action" (Lüscher & Hoff, 2013, p. 44) could be negotiated.

The level and type of support adult offspring provided varied according to the age of their parents. Adult offspring with older parents took on significant responsibilities in the home, ranging from physical caregiving to cleaning, gardening, and cooking, whereas adult offspring with younger parents provided more mentoring in the use of technology or social planning. Our observations of family life suggested that adult offspring's acts of love and care were

undertaken voluntarily and without financial reward. However, even when mentoring and caregiving support were extensive, they were rarely commended or acknowledged by the parents.

Mum has sciatica and needs help in the garden and around the house. I probably do about 2 hours a day, so I wouldn't say I'm a full-time carer or anything. ... But it isn't nothing. I do my bit to help. (Tracey Jones, B) Yes, she pitches in ... helping around the house. It's what you'd expect though, isn't it? You can't just laze around like it's a hotel. (Mary Jones, B)

The observed technical support given by adult offspring was extensive, spanning home computers, mobile phones, digital TV programming, and music storage. Although parents benefited from technical support and guidance provided by adult offspring, this again went largely unacknowledged as care. Liz Wright explained how her son upgraded her mobile phone to a smartphone and taught her how to use this. The sense of pride Liz expressed in demonstrating her mastery of a smartphone was included in her photo journal, where she shared her Facebook photos with the Women's Institute and encouraged friends to join.

However, it was not evident that Liz had acknowledged to her son that his care and support had in any way compensated for the burden of having him living within the familial home. Similar to Burn and Szoeki's (2016) research that found cohabiting adult offspring improved parents' levels of social engagement, the younger generation's mentoring, particularly as a result of rapid changes in technology, seemed to benefit the older generation in both a practical and a psychological sense.

He [my son] got me this smartphone, here. I can check email on it and texts. He's put my Facebook site on the front and it's also a camera. ... my last [mobile phone] cost ten quid from Tesco's and that came with credit too. This one was at least fifty [pounds] I think. ... it took him a while to show me how it works but I'm used to it now. I said: "What do I want with that?" But I'll admit, it's very good. They're very impressed at the WI. (Liz Wright, FL)

Whereas adult offspring were conscious of their contribution to the relationship in the form of caregiving and mentoring, parents were largely unconscious in their acceptance of this human support. It is widely agreed that if support exchanged between generations is understood as being reciprocal, both generations report more positive experiences of intergenerational cohabitation (Ackers, 2019; Burn & Szoeki, 2016). However, the adult offspring's acts of care and support failed to register against the economic support provided by parents. Lüscher and Hoff's (2013) model suggests that the mutual acknowledgment of love and care is a major factor in families dealing with ambivalence and making the move to an emancipation stage. However, this theme showed that the families seemed held in a captivation stage, with family relationships maintained reluctantly because of wider social and economic ideologies, and that it resulted in a lack of acknowledgment for nonfinancial acts of love and care. Burn and Szoeki (2016) suggest that for these more affirming relationships to develop, cohabitation needs to be established as a discrete adult relationship. However, as reflected in the next theme, the families had neither constructed new rules nor established cohabitation as a discrete adult relationship.

Theme 4: Our house, our rules: Regression to parent–child relations

This theme reflected that adult cohabitation did not result in a renegotiation of house rules for the families. Burn and Szoeki (2016) argue that negotiating new house rules is necessary to

establishing new practical boundaries that arise from cohabitation and that this negotiation can provide a forum for reconciling conflicting family values and establishing new adult–adult family relationships. A combination of the families’ feeling that negotiations over rules were too high-stakes to risk or too conflictual to maintain resulted in house rules going unnegotiated.

In the families with Failure to Launch offspring, the transition to adulthood had not triggered a family conversation about house rules. For example, Tom explained that he and his brother had at first agreed not to air their grievances about their living arrangements to “keep the peace” with their parents; but, after a period of 2 years, he requested a sit-down conversation where he and his brother “put everything out on the table.”

In the end I just decided it was time for a “come to Jesus” [a family conference where conflicts are aired and resolved]. They were treating us like we were still naughty kids and Mum in particular couldn’t seem to understand why me and Tim were so frustrated with it all. You’ve got to be able to have a KFC on the way home without getting an earful. (Tom Wright, FL)

Tom admitted that the family conference was “not handled that well” by him or his brother, resulting in the drawing of generational “battle lines” until heightened animosities petered out. In contrast to the evolutionary transition of the Failure to Launch offspring like Tom, the return of a Boomerang child marked a clearer change in living arrangements. However, we found that this new living arrangement did not lead to house rules being constructed as part of a two-way negotiation. Instead, rules were laid down by parents or simply assumed to be a continuation of those that existed when the younger generation were children. Parents’ position of economic and residential power seemed a default justification for them to maintain or assert house rules and expectations. As Thomas explains: “They were still treating me like a kid going on about curfews, not playing music after 9 p.m., silly rules that you’d impose on a kid, not a 25-year-old.” Thomas’s grievances at having a “curfew” and not being allowed to “play music” evoke Burn and Szoeké’s (2016) point that economic and residential inequality in cohabitation can lead to symbolic ideas of child dependency reemerging.

In the three Boomerang families, failure to renegotiate house rules resulted in a series of escalating altercations. However, these altercations failed to resolve issues with house rules because communication took the form of unfocused “rants.” The content of these altercations was hurtful and did not lead to constructive dialogues. Instead, these altercations commonly declined into angry expressions of unresolved webs of long-held, but largely undiscussed, interpersonal resentments. Tess gave the example of an unfocused “rant” that occurred when she tried to elicit sympathy from her mother about the lack of support she had received from her ex-husband in moving out:

I was only saying that he could of helped move my stuff, but then she flies into this lecturing rant about how I should have stuck at my [driving] lessons, and I was a quitter and that was only going to keep happening to me if I didn’t start to take some responsibility. (Tess Jackson, B)

In our observations, these three families showed continuing unease in their relationships with each other. In the Glover family, trading of sarcasm and insults between father and son was common. In the Thomas family, we observed a supermarket shopping trip when conflicting attitudes toward spending resulted in arguments concerning premium versus value brand selections. Although such altercations were common, most adult offspring felt unable to ask their parents for a discreet discussion of house rules because they felt that an open discussion might jeopardize their residence in the family home. As Lauren suggested:

I haven't got a leg to stand on if I want to push back ... [about] curfews or having friends over. I'm not contributing anything to the family pot and I know it's technically their house and they pay for everything, so it's checkmate. I have to abide by their rules and cop their crap. (Lauren Thompson, FL)

Lauren's metaphor of being in checkmate as a result of her dependence on her parents again illustrates Connidis and McMullin's (2002) argument that economic power directly impacts power in interpersonal negotiations. However, some parents also felt captive to their circumstances, as David explains:

It's been two years he's been back. ... we didn't think it would take so long for him to get back on his feet. ... Being here might not be helping because there's no sense of "I have to get my act together," you know? He knows he's always got a home here even if it's his doing, whatever his faults we wouldn't see him on the street. ... No, we can't push it with him in case he takes off. He's better off here than with god knows who, sleeping on their couch or whatever. ... You have to do the right thing by them. (David Glover, B)

David's quote reflects how structural factors also played a role in producing the protracted parent-child relationship for some parents. This regression back to a parent-child relationship was a key source of ambivalence in the families. Lüscher (2002) suggests that captivity reflects where power is used to "assert claims of one family member against another" (p. 589), reflected in this theme, by parents' position of economic and residential power being used to assert their house rules over and expectations of adult offspring.

However, persistent noncommunication was also caused by fear of conflict. Many parents and adult offspring suggested they avoided negotiation because they felt the stakes were too high. Thus, restrictive social welfare and housing (O'Higgins, 2012; Qian, 2012) meant families avoided negotiation as a result of the worry that, if negotiations went wrong, it could result in the adult offspring becoming homeless. This seemed to create a mesolevel deadlock for the families: adult offspring were captivated by their lack of financial resources and feelings of shame, and parents were captivated by their sense of filial duty. Therefore, emancipation seemed out of the question because, as Connidis and McMullin (2002) suggest, these families could not resolve their ambivalence because these problems were "structurally created" (p. 556).

CONCLUSION

In spite of the love and acts of care that families performed, cohabitation generated negative interpersonal relationships for most families in this study. The adult offspring's need for residential and financial support led to them being defined as failed adults by their parents and the wider society. The adult offspring seldom challenged this definition because they feared that conflict could jeopardize their financial and residential security. In addition to the precarious residential or financial situation of the adult offspring, the families' feelings of shame also reduced their sense of interpersonal security, so open dialogues about living arrangements and relationships were avoided.

The house, being the economic property of the parents, was used to legitimize their authority in the household. Parents used their authority to maintain their own status and perspectives, subordinating adult offspring and infantilizing them and subjecting them to nonnegotiated house rules. However, the authority that parents had over cohabitation did not coincide with a feeling of authority over their own lives. Instead, parents felt this living arrangement had

authority over them because it had left them captive to a sense of familial duty under which they had to curtail their personal desires for freedom and travel.

Lüscher and Hoff's (2013) typology suggests families need to share their ambivalent feelings with each other in open family dialogues to resolve ambivalence. However, adult offspring's lack of housing options made such dialogues too high-stakes for the families in this study. Therefore, although Lüscher and Hoff's definition of ambivalence at a captivation stage seems to characterize the interpersonal relationships created in this study by cohabitation, this ambivalence was constructed and maintained by structural contradictions and inequalities (Connidis & McMullin, 2002). As a result, this study supports Connidis and McMullin's (2002) definition of sociological ambivalence because this concept captures how structural limitations over residential and financial independence collided with the interpersonal relationships of the cohabiting families. Therefore, Lüscher and Hoff's dynamic model provides a useful characterization of ambivalence, but to capture the dialectic relationship between agency and structure experienced by the families in this study, ambivalence needs to be informed by a critical theory framework, as suggested by Connidis and McMullin.

The findings suggest that the application of sociological ambivalence is useful beyond academic research and can inform how ambivalences can be better managed and potentially resolved in society. In fact, the inability of these families to engage, empathize, and challenge the structural factors that defined their outcomes seemed to stop families from managing ambivalence and developing more positive relationships. Therefore, this research suggests that the role structural forces play in creating ambivalence must be acknowledged at both an interpersonal and a societal level.

To deal with cohabitation at the structural level, a national political negotiation is needed to address the current contradiction in the social contract on the provision of family social care. The retrenchment of the welfare state, in particular, the selling off of council housing by the conservative government in the 1980s, has reduced the state's role in this social contract. Consequently, the transfer of family care from the family to the state has reversed, and care responsibilities are being thrown back onto family members. Unless there is a significant change in state spending on social programs or affordable new housing and residential aged care, family cohabitation will continue to rise per the trend of the past 30 or more years.

Lüscher et al. (2010) suggest we need policies that directly engage with "intergenerational justice" (p. 114) to redistribute resources between generations. Legitimization and normalization of intergenerational cohabitation through privately and publicly funded programs and policies is one such way of addressing this economic imbalance. Prochaska (2017) proposes intergenerational living as one of the five housing models that can save the National Health Service (NHS) and social care budgets, citing an example of one such scheme already operating in the Netherlands. This scheme, called Care Centre Humanitas, houses students alongside people over 55 years as a means of addressing the dual societal concerns of burgeoning need for affordable housing and residential aged care. Dent (2016) argues that the rollout of intergenerational mortgage schemes from lenders such as Nationwide has utility in encouraging sharing of resources across generations. If social policy interventions such as these are not enacted, the emancipation that Lüscher and Hoff's (2013) model suggests is needed will remain out of reach for an increasing population of young people and will likely produce similar ambivalent cohabiting family relationships.

Given ambivalence was generated by structural factors such as a lack of affordable housing and scarcity of graduate jobs, it cannot be resolved by families alone at an interpersonal level. However, as Connidis and McMullin (2002) suggest, although sociological ambivalence cannot always be resolved at an interpersonal level, families can try to understand it as a "shared situation of ambivalence" (p. 565). Thus, a strategy for families to better manage this ambivalence could be for families to transfer the site of their ambivalent feelings from the personal (micro) to the structural (macro). This way, although both parties may still feel cohabitation is a nonideal living arrangement, they can also acknowledge that the sociopolitical system—not each other—is in large part responsible

for it. This would alleviate generational feelings of shame and guilt and could then be a step toward mobilizing structural social change. Therefore, emphasizing the structural could be a useful means for framing family discussion when giving families guidance on this living arrangement of cohabitation.

ORCID

Sherree Dawn Halliwell  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7322-0950>

George Karl Ackers  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3000-0330>

REFERENCES

- Ackers, G. K. (2019). The “dual tension” created by negotiating upward social mobility and habitus: A generational study of skilled working-class men, their sons and grandsons following deindustrialization. *Current Sociology*, 68(7), 891–911. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392119888563>
- Balomenou, N., & Garrod, B. (2016). A review of participant-generated image methods in the social sciences. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 10(4), 325–351.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Burn, K., & Szoek, C. (2016). Boomerang families and failure-to-launch: Commentary on adult children living at home. *Maturitas*, 83, 9–12.
- Connidis, I. A. (2015). Exploring ambivalence in family ties: Progress and prospects. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(1), 77–95.
- Connidis, I., & McMullin, J. (2002). Sociological ambivalence and family ties: A critical perspective. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64(3), 558–567.
- Cox, E. (2020). A feminist proposal for a fair universal social dividend. *Hecate*, 45(1/2), 247–266. [https://search-informit-org.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/doi/10.3316/informit.625098938396546](https://search.informit-org.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/doi/10.3316/informit.625098938396546)
- Dent, G. (2016, May 30). Want to solve the housing and social care crises? Then share a mortgage with your grandma. *The Independent*. <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/want-to-solve-the-housing-and-social-care-crises-share-a-mortgage-with-your-grandma-a7056641.html>
- Ehn, B., & Löfgren, O. (2006). *Kulturanalyser*. Klim.
- Finch, J. (1989). *Family obligations and social change*. Polity Press.
- Hanisch, C. (2000). The personal is political. In B. A. Crow (Ed.), *Radical feminism: A documentary reader [online]* (pp. 113–116). NYU Press.
- Kahn, J., Goldscheider, F., & Garcia, J. (2013). Growing parental economic power in parent–adult child households: Coresidence and financial dependency in the United States, 1960–2010. *Demography*, 50(4), 1449–1475.
- Koslow, S., & Booth, H. (2012, August 24). Generation boomerang: Children who go back to mum and dad. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/aug/24/generation-boomerang-adultescents>
- Letiecq, B. L., Bailey, S. J., & Dahlen, P. (2008). Ambivalence and coping among custodial grandparents. In B. Hayslip & P. L. Kaminski (Eds.), *Parenting the custodial grandchild. Implications for clinical practice* (pp. 3–16). Springer.
- Lewis, J., West, A., Roberts, J., & Noden, P. (2016). The experience of co-residence: Young adults returning to the parental home after graduation in England. *Families, Relationships, and Societies*, 5(2), 247–262. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1332/204674315X14309191424695>
- Lüscher, K. (2002). Intergenerational ambivalence. Further steps in theory and research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 64(3), 585–593.
- Lüscher, K., & Hoff, A. (2013). Intergenerational ambivalence: Beyond solidarity and conflict. In I. Albert & D. Ferring (Eds.), *Intergenerational relations* (pp. 39–63). Policy Press.
- Lüscher, K., Liegle, L., Lange, A., Hoff, A., Stoffel, M., Viry, G., & Widmer, E. (2010). *Generations–intergenerational relations–generational politics: A trilingual compendium*. SAGW.
- Lüscher, K., & Pillemer, K. (1998). Intergenerational ambivalence: A new approach to the study of parent–child relations in later life. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60(2), 413–425.
- McQuaid, K., Vanderbeck, R. M., Valentine, G., Diprose, K., & Chen, L. (2019). “An elephant cannot fail to carry its own ivory”: Transgenerational ambivalence, infrastructure and sibling practices in urban Uganda. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 32, 100537. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2018.07.009>
- Morgan, D. H. J. (1985). *The family, politics, and social theory*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Newman, K. S. (2012, February 3). A global check-in at the Inn of Mom & Dad. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 58(22), B11–B13.
- Oakley, A. (1974). *Housewife*. Lane.
- Office for National Statistics. (2018). Families and households in the UK, 2018. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2018>

- O'Higgins, N. (2012). This time it's different? Youth labour markets during "the Great Recession.". *Comparative Economic Studies*, 54(2), 395–412 This Time It's Different? Youth Labour Markets during 'The Great Recession'.
- Otters, R. V., & Hollander, J. F. (2015). Leaving home and boomerang decisions: A family simulation protocol. *Marriage & Family Review*, 51(1), 39–58.
- Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Prochaska, W. (2017, March 3). Five housing models that can save NHS and social care budgets. HuffPost. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/will-prochaska/nhs-budgets_b_15129422.html
- Rappoport, A., & Lowenstein, A. (2007). A possible innovative association between the concept of inter-generational ambivalence and the emotions of guilt and shame in care-giving. *European Journal*, 4(1), 13–21.
- Riessman, C. H. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage Publications.
- Schwartz, S. H. (1999). A theory of cultural values and some implications for work. *Applied Psychology*, 48(1), 23–47.
- Tsekeris, C., Ntali, E., Koutrias, A., & Chatzoulis, A. (2017). Boomerang kids in contemporary Greece: Young people's experience of coming home again (Hellenic Observatory Papers on Greece and Southeast Europe, GreeSE Paper No. 108). <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/80787824.pdf>
- University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research. (2020). Understanding Society: Waves 1–10, 2009–2019 and Harmonised BHPS: Waves 1–18, 1991–2009 [Data collection] (13th ed.). UK Data Service. <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-14>
- Wengraf, T. (2004). The Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM)—Short guide. <https://www.scribd.com/document/314189703/Wengraf-Tom-Biographic-Narrative-Interpretive-Method-Short-Guide>
- Wright Mills, C. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. Oxford University Press.

How to cite this article: Halliwell, S. D., & Ackers, G. K. (2022). "The interpersonal is political": Understanding the sociological ambivalence created in parent and adult offspring cohabiting relationships. *Family Relations*, 71(3), 1247–1265. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12627>