Parent’s Union Transitions and Ambivalence Toward Children Later in Life

Anna M. Hammersmith (hammera@bgsu.edu)
Department of Sociology, Bowling Green State University

Background

• Strength of ties between parents and children persist over the life course, but are constantly in flux (Bridit, 2009; Kaufmann & Uhlenberg, 1998).
• Increasing prevalence of union transitions later life (Brown & Lin, 2012; Lin & Brown, 2012; Brown et al., 2012).

Theoretical Background

• Ambivalence (Luscher & Pilmer, 1998)
  – Simultaneous feelings of conflict and closeness
  – Linked to poorer health (Lendon et al., 2014).

Union Transitions in Later Life

• Union dissolution for people 50 and older
  – 1.2 million became widows in 2010 (Brown et al., under review).
• Rise in union formation later in life (Brown, Bulanda, & Lee, 2012).

Union Transitions and Ambivalence

• Widowhood brings parents and children closer together (Ha and Ingersoll-Dayton, 2008).
• Divorce and union formation may increase ambivalence
  – Children support parents during divorce or union formation, but transitions may create conflict by disrupting family functioning (Rakosnawy et al., 2003).

Hypotheses

• Widows will feel less ambivalence toward children, while divorcées will feel more ambivalence.
• Forming a union will result in more ambivalence toward children.

Data

• Health and Retirement Study (HRS), 2006 to 2012.
• Sample includes non-institutionalized respondents who filled out the Psychosocial Survey, were 50+, had children, and were ever married as of 2006
• Final analytic sample includes 7,384 respondents

Sample Distribution

Figure 1. Sample Distribution

Descriptive Results

Table 1. Weighted Descriptive Statistics for Six Union Transition Groups (N=7,384)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continuous</th>
<th>Married (Ref)</th>
<th>Divorced or Separated</th>
<th>Widowhood</th>
<th>Blended</th>
<th>Remarriage (Ref)</th>
<th>Cohabitation</th>
<th>Continuous Single</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence in T1</td>
<td>2.90(0.01)</td>
<td>2.84(0.02)</td>
<td>3.16(0.10)</td>
<td>3.19(0.14)</td>
<td>2.78(0.04)</td>
<td>2.93(0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>48.42</td>
<td>40.73</td>
<td>28.14</td>
<td>18.96</td>
<td>54.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>3.07(0.12)</td>
<td>2.27(0.29)</td>
<td>3.39(0.14)</td>
<td>3.42(0.14)</td>
<td>2.86(0.26)</td>
<td>3.06(0.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>7.07</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>5.74</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>56.01</td>
<td>60.49</td>
<td>56.89</td>
<td>54.78</td>
<td>56.04</td>
<td>77.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Predicted Probabilities

• Dependent Variable: Ambivalence in T2 (Ha and Ingersoll-Dayton, 2008).

Measures and Analysis

• Ambivalence= (positive+negative)/2
• Independent Variables: Union Transitions
• Covariates
• Lagged Dependent Variable Regression

Measures and Analysis

• Future Directions
  – Incorporate future waves of data
  – Examine analyses by gender
  – Study differences in positive and negative feelings

Conclusion

Figure 2. Predicted Probabilities of Ambivalence in T2 from the Regression of Ambivalence in T2 on Ambivalence in T1, Union Transitions, and Other Covariates

Figure 2. Predicted Probabilities of Ambivalence in T2

This research was supported in part by the Center for Family and Demographic Research, Bowling Green State University, which has core funding from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (R24HD050959). This research was supported in part by the Center for Family and Demographic Research, Bowling Green State University, which has core funding from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (R24HD050959). This research was supported in part by the Center for Family and Demographic Research, Bowling Green State University, which has core funding from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (R24HD050959).