Understanding The Dual Nature of Ambivalence: Why and When Ambivalence Leads to Good and Bad Outcomes

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Understanding The Dual Nature of Ambivalence:

Why and When Ambivalence Leads to Good and Bad Outcomes

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Abstract

A growing body of research unveils the ubiquity of ambivalence —the simultaneous experience of positive and negative emotional or cognitive orientations towards a person, situation, object, task, or goal — in organizations, and argues that its experience may be the norm rather than the exception. While traditionally viewed as something to be avoided, organizational scholars in fields ranging from micro-organizational behavior to strategy have made significant advances in exploring the positive outcomes of ambivalence. However, despite identifying benefits of ambivalence that are critical to organizing (e.g., trust, adaptation, and creativity), research remains fragmented and siloed. The primary purpose of this review is to advance research on ambivalence by reviewing, synthesizing and ultimately reconciling prior work on the negative consequences with promising emerging work on the positive - that is, functional and beneficial – outcomes of or responses to ambivalence. We significantly extend prior work by demonstrating that the myriad negative and positive outcomes of ambivalence may be organized around two key dimensions that underlie most research on the effects of ambivalence: (1) a flexibility dimension: inflexibility to flexibility, and an (2) engagement dimension: disengagement to engagement. We further discuss the mechanisms and moderators that can lead to the more positive sides of these dimensions, and suggest avenues for future research.
Introduction

Discussions of the nature of ambivalence appear as early as Plato and Aristotle, and for some time, scholars have argued that ambivalence—the simultaneous experience of positive and negative emotional or cognitive orientations towards a person, situation, object, task, goal, or idea, and the feelings of tension and conflict that result—may even be more the norm than the exception in organizations (Coser, 1979; Merton 1976; Weigert and Franks, 1989). Despite the long and broad history of interest in the concept, ambivalence has only recently garnered increasing interest in the field of management. Notably, this burgeoning interest crosses multiple management disciplines, including (but not limited to) organizational behavior, organizational theory, and strategy. Also notable, and in support of the arguments made many years ago (Merton, 1976), this growing body of research has further revealed the ubiquity of ambivalence in organizational settings.

That ambivalence is pervasive in organizations is not surprising given that organizational members are constantly balancing contradictory demands within their work relationships, work groups, and broader organizational environments that should give rise to ambivalent experiences (see Ashforth, Rogers, Pratt and Pradies, 2014 for a review). At the interpersonal level, people have complex relationships with colleagues (Zhou and Ingram, 2013), protégés (Eby, Butts, Durley and Ragins, 2010), customers (Pratt and Doucet, 2000), bosses (Pratt and Doucet, 2000), and negotiation partners (Rothman, 2011). For instance, workers navigate overbearing but caring managers (Duffy et al., 2002), and friendships with colleagues that are sometimes also competitive (Zhou and Ingram, 2013; Ingram and Zhou, 2008). At the group level, members balance simultaneous needs to belong and to be special and unique (Smith and Berg, 1987), and may find some pleasure in intense, negative rivalries with other groups (Fiol, Pratt and
O’Connor, 2009). At the organizational level, leaders and employees balance contradictory needs for competition and cooperation, utilitarian (e.g., profit-making) and normative (e.g., saving the environment) identities, organizational stability and change, structure and flexibility, exploring and exploiting, and short-term success and long-term sustainability (e.g., Albert and Adams, 2003; Albert and Whetten, 1985; Brandenburger and Nalebuff, 1996; Bridge and Baxter, 1992; Galinsky and Schweitzer, 2015; Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004; Ingram and Roberts, 2000; Klein et al., 2006; O’Reilly and Tushman, 2008; Smith and Lewis, 2011; Smith and Tushman, 2005; Weir, 2011). To the degree that such complex social, practical, and motivational situations are at the same time oppositional, we would argue that they give rise to emotions and attitudes that are just as complex and contradictory and are best characterized as ambivalent (Ashforth, et al., 2014; Wang and Pratt, 2008).

A count of papers published on ambivalence confirms widespread recognition of and an accelerating interest in ambivalence across management disciplines, including organizational behavior, organizational theory, and strategy, in addition to other fields (e.g., psychology; see Table 1). This interest has begun to lead to some synthesis regarding how ambivalence is evoked within organizations (Ashforth and Reingen, 2014; Ashforth, et al. 2014; Fong and Tiedens, 2002; Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004; Pratt and Doucet, 2000; Pratt and Pradies, 2011; Rothman and Melwani, in press), in everyday life (Ersner-Hershfield, Mikels, Sullivan and Carstensen, 2008; Larsen et al., 2001; Larsen and McGraw, 2011; Laurenceau, Troy and Carver, 2005) and within the laboratory (de Vega, Diaz and Leon, 1997; Larsen, McGraw, Mellers and Cacioppo, 2004; Williams and Aaker, 2002; Schimmack 2001).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE
The purpose of our review is to discuss the role of ambivalence in organizations. However, a review of any literature is never entirely value-neutral. Researchers have to decide what is figure and what is ground. Given our explicit managerial focus – specifically, what can facilitate functioning in and of organizations – our review is focused around a few core concerns that differentiate our review from many before it (e.g., Ashforth, et al., 2014). First, we are focused more on the outcomes of ambivalence than on why it happens. While we briefly review the antecedents of ambivalence, as noted in our opening, we start with the assumption that ambivalence is inherent to organizational life. Indeed, despite progress and increased synthesis around understanding what causes ambivalence, research on the effects of ambivalence in organizations remains more fragmented and less integrated.

Second, we focus our review not just on the more traditionally discussed negative outcomes of or responses to ambivalence, but also on the less intuitive positive (beneficial and functional) outcomes/responses (see Pratt and Doucet, 2000). By functional and beneficial, we refer to reactions to ambivalence that foster enhanced affective, cognitive, behavioral, and relational outcomes at the personal, interpersonal, group, and organizational levels of analysis. Specifically, recent work suggests that contrary to assumptions, when it comes to ambivalence, experiencing it rather than resolving it may be functional and beneficial. Indeed, a number of empirical studies and a few theoretical articles suggest there are benefits from experiencing and expressing ambivalence, and these benefits appear at multiple levels of analysis (Fong, 2006; Guarana and Hernandez, 2015; Plambeck and Weber, 2009; Pradies and Pratt, 2016; Pratt and Pradies, 2011; Rees, Rothman, Lehavy and Sanchez-Burks, 2013; Rothman and Melwani, in press; Rothman and Northcraft, 2015; Rothman and Wiesenfeld, 2007; Vogus, Rothman, Sutcliffe and Weick, 2014; Weick, 2001).
Third, to facilitate prediction and management, we want to know why these effects happen, and when more positive versus more negative effects are likely to occur. That is, unlike other perspectives on ambivalence, we make it a point to review the specific cognitive, emotional, and behavioral mechanisms that have either been theorized or empirically tested thus far and that facilitate the transformation of ambivalence into a beneficial force (“why” ambivalence is beneficial); as well as the moderators that determine when the effects of ambivalence are positive or negative (“when” ambivalence is beneficial).

Fourth, because we are most concerned with the positive effects of ambivalence in organizations, we focus primarily on organizational scholarship as research in this domain has most fully examined the salutary effects of ambivalence. However, we will also consider research and literature from other fields. In many cases, these fields have longer histories examining ambivalence, including our sister disciplines of psychology (e.g., social and clinical) and sociology, and so we believe they are important to include. Indeed, we believe it is critical for research on ambivalence in organizations to integrate the insights from these disparate literatures. As such, one focus of our review is on pulling together the currently fragmented research from a variety of relevant fields, and in doing so, better revealing the unique role of the social and organizational context in these dynamics.

What Ambivalence Is and Is Not

To provide a foundation for our arguments, we begin by discussing what ambivalence is and is not. Table 2 provides key definitions and some readings on each of the different forms of ambivalence that we review - including attitudinal ambivalence, emotional ambivalence (or mixed emotions), relational ambivalence, trait ambivalence, and expressed ambivalence. While the specific wording of their definitions may slightly differ, these definitions share important
features. Most definitions of ambivalence emphasize the simultaneous existence of strong, polar opposite feelings or attitudes towards a given object, event, idea, or person. Indeed, ambivalence literally refers to the experience of two (ambi) opposing forces (valences) and is derived from the Latin ambo, or “both” and valere, which means “to be strong” (Meyerson and Scully, 1995).

Building from these different conceptualizations, and particularly from Ashforth and colleagues (2014: 1454), we define ambivalence as the simultaneous experience of opposing orientations towards an object or target, where “orientation refers to the actor’s alignment or position with regard to the object” (Ashforth et al., 2014; p. 1454).

Ambivalence is similar to, but distinct from, a variety of other constructs. Table 3 (from Ashforth, et al., 2014) describes the differences between ambivalence and cognitive dissonance, emotional dissonance, hypocrisy, ambiguity, and equivocality at the individual level. In general, these constructs differ because ambivalence is about oppositions, and not simply inconsistencies (cognitive dissonance), discrepancies (emotional dissonance), multiplicities (equivocality) or uncertainties (ambiguities). To this list we add other constructs which may be confused with ambivalence. Table 4 distinguishes individually held ambivalence from specific types of mixed feelings such as those held during meaningful endings (poignancy), or as a result of personality (emotional complexity and affective synchrony). It also distinguishes individually held ambivalence from its likely outcomes (paradoxical frames and integrative complexity).

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1We modify the definition from an exclusive focus on “positive” and “negative” orientations because some scholars (Rothman, 2011; Rothman and Wiesenfeld, 2007) have suggested that it is worth considering a broader conceptualization of ambivalence. They suggest that emotions, for instance, that comprise this state can be conflicting with one another not only on the valence dimension, but also in terms discrete emotion components, such as cognitive appraisals or action tendencies. For instance, ambivalence may arise from simultaneously experiencing two negative emotions that differ in their action tendency – such as when fear and its associated avoidance tendencies accompanies anger which triggers attack tendencies. Moreover, emotional ambivalence may arise from simultaneously experiencing two emotions that differ in their cognitive appraisals. The experience of emotional ambivalence may therefore involve a wide variety of emotions, but what is important here is that the two simultaneous emotions, whether they vary in terms of their cognitive appraisals, valence, or action tendencies, make people feel torn and conflicted, and provide indeterminate behavioral guidance.
Antecedents of Ambivalence

Due to our emphasis on the positive responses to ambivalence, the bulk of our chapter is on what happens after someone has become ambivalent. The antecedents to ambivalence, especially in organizations, have been reviewed elsewhere (Ashforth, et al., 2014; Wang and Pratt, 2008). Consistent with those reviews, we argue that there are at least four primary sources of ambivalence. The first is individual propensities towards ambivalence. Specifically, research suggests that some individuals are more susceptible to the experience of ambivalence than others (King and Emmons, 1990; Thompson and Zanna, 1995; Thompson, Naccarato, Parker and Moskowitz, 2001). Moreover, other scholars have shown that traits like cognitive representations of the self and emotion (Rafaeli, Rogers and Revelle, 2007), dialectical thinking (Hui, Fok and Bond, 2009), personal fear of invalidity, low need for cognition (Thompson and Zanna, 1995), and age (Ong and Bergeman, 2004) are also associated with greater psychological ambivalence. Thus, as noted by Wang and Pratt (2008) the presence of ambivalence in organizations may be due, at least in part, to the selection of people with these characteristics.

A second source of ambivalence in organizations (and elsewhere) is relationships. As we discuss below, psychodynamic scholars emphasize the quality of parent-child relationships as a source of ambivalence (e.g., Bowlby, 1982; Horney, 1945). However, ambivalence may form in other relationships over time. Indeed, because “familiarity breeds ambivalence” (Brooks and Highhouse, 2006, p. 105), factors such as the length of time spent in a relationship, frequency of interaction, and interaction across multiple domains of work and life may cause negative aspects to rise to the surface (Braiker and Kelley, 1979). Thus, work relationships that are longstanding, are of high-frequency, and/or are “multiplex” (i.e., involving different relationship types such as
personal and professional) may cause ambivalence (for a review see Melwani, Methot and Rothman, working paper). More generally, Pradies and Pratt (2016) argue that relational interactions are critical to collective-level ambivalence, and that group-level ambivalence can result either from interactions among similarly ambivalent individuals or interactions among competing subgroups within a larger collective.

A third major source of ambivalence in organizations involves certain types of organizational events. One of the most profound events is organizational change. Indeed research suggests that change can elicit conflicting feelings and emotions because it involves both negative (e.g., giving up cherished traditions, introducing uncertainty) and positive (e.g., hope for the future, new opportunities) simultaneously (Piderit, 2000; Rothman and Melwani, in press; Vince and Broussine, 1996). To illustrate, Vince and Broussine's (1996) study of public service managers shows that simultaneous experience of incongruent emotions, such as excitement and fear, resulted from organizational change. Such events need not be dramatic and organization-wide, however. Research in psychology suggests that personal transition events may elicit ambivalence as well (e.g., Larsen, et al., 2001; Ersner-Hershfield, et al, 2008). More generally, any events that contain positive and negative elements may, not surprisingly, elicit contradictory feelings and thoughts (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, and Staw, 2005; Diener and Iran-Nejad, 1986; Laurenceau, et al., 2005; Schimmack, 2001; de Vega et al., 1997; Williams and Aaker, 2002). For example, Larsen, McGraw, Mellers, and Cacioppo (2004) found that the experience of disappointing wins and relieving losses trigger ambivalence; hence, one might expect organizational members to experience ambivalence in response to a whole host of events such as in the wake of positive, yet lower-than-expected, earning results or in the wake of a crisis where the impact on stock price was less than analysts had anticipated.
A fourth major source of ambivalence in organizations is *structural conditions.* This source of ambivalence is the domain of “sociological ambivalence.” Sociological ambivalence explores conflicting demands inherent in social structures such as norms (Merton, 1976) and roles (Coser, 1979), and collectively-held identities (Albert and Adams, 2003; Albert and Whetton, 1985; Wang and Pratt, 2008). Such structurally embedded contradictions may ultimately influence ambivalence at the level we are discussing: within individuals. To illustrate, physicians are supposed to demonstrate “detached concern” whereby they are supposed to be empathetic but maintain professional distance (Merton and Barber, 1976). To the degree that such norms and roles are internalized, individually-held ambivalence may result. Further, when two, shared conceptualizations of “who we are” as an organization are “defended as inviolate, experienced as incompatible, and yet found to be indispensable” (Albert and Adams, 2003: 36), these “hybrid” collective-level identities can serve as a source for sociological ambivalence (Wang and Pratt, 2008; Pradies and Pratt, 2016), and thus are viewed as potential antecedents to individually-held ambivalence.

Other organizational conditions, such as limited resources, competing reward systems, or conflicting goals also spark ambivalence. Ingram and Zou recently (2013) found that employees are likely to feel ambivalently towards those in similar social network positions (i.e., structurally equivalent). Specifically, managers are more likely to feel ambivalently towards friends who are the same sex, in the same work unit, share the same social rank, and share many common friends. The authors argue that similarity breeds friendship, but it also leads to competition because it encourages social comparisons (Zhou and Ingram, 2013). Indeed, employees sometimes have to compete for promotions with their colleagues with whom they also have close relationships. Losing out on a promotion to a colleague/friend is likely to give rise to conflicted
feelings derived from not only believing one deserves the promotion but also wanting to maintain a friendship with the colleague.

Finally, it is important to note that individual-level propensities, relationships, and structural conditions may interact in organizations to produce ambivalence. To illustrate, Fong and Tiedens’s (2002) research suggests being a woman in a high-status position increases the incidence of both happy and sad emotions. Happiness is thought to result from achieving an important goal of high status, and sadness is thought to result from holding a non-stereotypic gender role. Additionally, Zou and Ingram (2013) suggest that managers who are high in self-monitoring may also be more likely to feel ambivalence towards their relationship partners because they are more likely to perceive competition with friends.

THE EFFECTS OF AMBIVALENCE: TWO KEY DIMENSIONS

As noted, from its original roots in psychology and later sociology, ambivalence has largely been considered a condition to be avoided or resolved. Indeed, because it violates fundamental consistency motives (Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958), ambivalence is largely characterized as undesirable, unpleasant, and physiologically arousing (e.g., see van Harreveld, Rutjens, Rotteveel, Nordgren, and van der Plight, 2009; van Harreveld, Rutjens, Schneider, Nohlen and Keskinis, 2014). Thus, individuals are thought to be motivated to avoid and to reduce or minimize ambivalence and the discomfort it elicits in a variety of ways (see van Harreveld et al., 2009 and van Harreveld et al., 2014 for reviews). Indeed, the types of negative outcomes of ambivalence that have largely been studied in psychology largely build on the assumption that negative affects is the driving mechanism.2 This emphasis on the negative

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2 In psychology, the negative affect that results from ambivalent cognitions or attitudes is often referred to as “subjective” ambivalence (see Thompson, Zanna and Griffin, 1995 for discussion of difference between objective and subjective ambivalence). However, to reduce the confusion around various labels (e.g., subjective ambivalence versus emotional ambivalence), we do not use this term in this paper.
consequences of ambivalence continues to echo in organizational research as well (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2014; Pratt and Doucet, 2000). However, examinations of ambivalence by organizational behavior and strategy scholars, in particular, have begun to view ambivalence as something that can also facilitate positive outcomes (Pratt and Pradies, 2011; Rothman and Melwani, in press) across multiple levels of analysis. In fact, one of the contributions of organizational research on the study of ambivalence has been to go beyond its negative effects (Pratt and Pradies, 2011).

We significantly extend this work by demonstrating that two key dimensions underlie most research on ambivalence and represent the negative and positive “sides” of ambivalence. These dimensions are inflexibility-flexibility and disengagement-engagement. Our review suggests that research that focuses on the degree to which ambivalence leads to inflexible (e.g., rigid) or more flexible (e.g., adaptive) responses or outcomes is largely focused on the psychological experience of ambivalence by a single entity (e.g., an individual, an organizational agent). However, research that focuses on the degree to which ambivalence leads to disengagement (e.g., moving away) or engagement (e.g., moving towards) from or with others in a relationship [cf. “knowledge” vs. “relationship” ambivalence – Pratt and Pradies, 2011] focuses on ambivalence experienced and/or expressed by an entity in interaction with another entity – such as leaders and followers, or two negotiators.

Along these dimensions, we discuss research that relates to “positive” versus “negative” responses to ambivalence. With regard to the inflexibility-flexibility dimension, inflexibility is largely viewed as negative and flexibility is largely viewed as positive. With regard to disengagement-engagement, the picture is slightly more complex. While disengagement is largely, but not exclusively, viewed negatively, engagement can take on either negative (e.g., aggression) or positive (e.g., commitment) forms. We further argue that to harness the positive
side of ambivalence in these areas, research must focus on the mechanisms – and especially the moderators – that explain why and when each of these outcomes of ambivalence arises.

**Inflexible-Flexible Responses to Experiencing Ambivalence**

Research in psychology and management has shown the effects of experiencing ambivalence on (in)flexible cognition, behavior, and emotional responses. First, experiencing ambivalence elicits one-sided, narrow thinking and bias, but also cognitive breadth, consideration of multiple perspectives, and unlearning. Second, experiencing ambivalence produces both behavioral inflexibility for individuals and organizations in the form of reduced ability to decide, resistance to change, and paralysis, but also flexibility and adaptability. Third, experiencing ambivalence is also linked with less and more emotional, mental, and physical well-being. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the observed deleterious effects of ambivalence often contain seeds of adaptable, positive, responses. Below, we map cognitive, behavioral and affective reactions along different ends of the flexibility-inflexibility continuum. We then discuss the moderators that may tip ambivalence towards one end or the other.

**Cognitive Inflexibility**

A salient theme in research on ambivalence is that attitude ambivalence increases cognitive bias, characterized by *one-sided, unequivocal, or extreme judgments and attitudes*. These inflexible cognitions manifest in a few different ways, as: (1) response amplification; (2) reduced ability to decide, (3) confirmation bias, and (4) compensatory order perceptions. While we consider these cognitive outcomes of ambivalence in their own right, future sections of our review illustrate how these can also be considered mechanisms explaining other forms of inflexibility as well (e.g., behavioral inflexibility). Moreover, as we indicate in the sections
below, the eliciting of negative affect is the key mechanism explaining the relationship between the experience of cognitive ambivalence and the resulting cognitive inflexibility.

(1) **Response amplification.** For decades, the experience of attitude ambivalence has been associated with response-amplification of ingroup members toward outgroup members such as minority ethnic groups (e.g., Katz and Glass, 1979; Katz and Haas, 1988; MacDonald and Zanna, 1998; Maio, Bell and Esses, 1996), and more recently towards controversial topics such as genetically modified food (Norgren, van Harreveld, and van der Pligt, 2006; Nowlis, Kahn and Dhar, 2002), abortion, nuclear power plants, and junk food taxation (Clark, Wegener, and Fabrigar, 2008). This research suggests that negative affect can mediate the effect of holding ambivalent attitudes on extreme responses towards the target of ambivalence. Specifically, ambivalence for minority group members can involve feelings of aversion and disdain but also friendly concern. When made salient, the ambivalent attitude gives rise to psychological discomfort (i.e., negative affect), and more extreme judgments allow for the reduction of this negative affect (Hass, Katz, Rizzo, Bailey, and Eisenstadt, 1991; Hass, Katz, Rizzo, Bailey and Moore, 1992; Maio, Greenland, Bernard and Esses, 2001).

Research in management has extended these findings, demonstrating that ambivalent individuals can idealize their relationship with their organization, setting aside all negative sentiments and ultimately leading to biased and simplistic views (Pratt and Doucet, 2000; Pratt and Pradies, 2011; Vadera and Pratt, 2013). Pratt and Doucet (2000) describe positive response amplification in a rural doctor who was ambivalent about joining a managed care operation, but in resolving his ambivalence came to view his new arrangement very positively – so much so that all negatives were pushed aside. He stated, “I don’t see any downside at all, I have no

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3 Although, some research has found that intergroup ambivalence is negatively correlated with physiological arousal, suggesting that arousal is not a necessary mediator of the relationship between intergroup ambivalence and information processing (Maio, Greenland, Bernard, and Esses, 2001).
complaints about what is going on” (Pratt and Doucet, 2000, p. 215). As Pratt and Pradies (2011) note, although this approach is positive, leading to a favorable assessment of the target of one’s ambivalence, it may also lead to biased and simplistic views that, “is likely, at minimum, to lead to disappointment when undesirable aspects of the new relationship invariably appear” (p. 927).

(2) Reduced ability to decide. Psychological research demonstrates that ambivalence leads to greater indecision and vacillation (Sincoff, 1990), rumination about goal strivings (Emmons and King, 1988; Van Harreveld, Van der Pligt et al., 2009), and procrastination or delay in decision making (Nohlen, van Harreveld, van der Pligt and Rotteveel, 2015 cited in van Harreveld et al., 2015). Interestingly, despite the importance of speed in managerial scholarship, only a few managerial scholars have addressed the effect of ambivalence on the inability to decide (Pratt and Doucet, 2000; Pratt and Pradies, 2011; Rothman and Wiesenfeld, 2007; Weick, 1998). Weick (1998), for example, acknowledged that the ambivalence that tempers knowing with doubting can undermine confidence and impact individuals’ ability to decide and act.

(3) Confirmation bias. In some psychological research, the experience of attitude ambivalence is also related to confirmation bias. In order to reduce attitude ambivalence, people appear to attempt to resolve their ambivalence through the selective elaboration of one-sided information and confirmatory information processing. Essentially, individuals experience a heightened accessibility, search, consideration, and use of information that benefits their currently held conceptions (e.g., hypothesis, belief, attitude) and neglect information that may disprove them (Clark, Wegener, and Fabrigar, 2008). Seeking and processing confirmatory information is viewed as more likely to reduce attitude ambivalence (i.e., creating a univalent attitude) and the discomfort (i.e., negative affect) associated with it than seeking and processing disconfirmatory information. However, as we discuss in the next section, it is also worth noting
that some organizational behavior research has found the opposite, that experiencing emotional ambivalence can broaden individuals’ attention rather than narrow it.

(4) Compensatory order perceptions. Research in social psychology on compensatory order perceptions has also linked ambivalent attitudes to more inaccurate and simplified perceptions, such as the development of false perceptions of order in domains about which the individual is not ambivalent. For example, this research demonstrates that attitude ambivalence leads people to perceive images in pictures when none exist (e.g., illusory pattern perception), and to report stronger conspiracy beliefs, which represent complex events in a simplified and monocausal way (Van Harreveld, et al., 2014).

Prior work theorizes that the desire to reduce ambivalence-induced negative affect explains the relationship between ambivalent attitudes and compensatory order perceptions (Van Harreveld et al., 2014) as well as confirmatory information processing (e.g., Nordgren et al., 2006; Sawicki et al., 2013). Indeed, research suggests that feeling torn and conflicted (e.g., Clark et al., 2008; Sawicki et al., 2013) and self-reported negative emotions (e.g., Norgren et al., 2006; Van Harreveld et al., 2014) underlie the relationship between holding ambivalent attitudes and engaging in selective and biased information processing and perception. Specifically, because ambivalent attitudes increase uncertainty-related negative emotions (e.g., uncertainty, anxiety, irritation, doubt, and nervousness), they foster motivated perceptions of the world as orderly (compensatory order), which appears to affirm or compensate for internal disorder resulting from felt ambivalence. In this way, compensatory order perceptions restore the overall consistency that humans prefer (Heider, 1946; Van Harreveld et al., 2014) and may help to mitigate ambivalence-induced negative affect (Jost and Burgess, 2000), thus making it easier for

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4 This is supported by evidence that the effects on cognitive processing are found only in the context of mixed feelings (e.g., Clark et al., 2008; Sawicki et al., 2013) or self reported negative emotions (e.g., Norgren et al., 2006; Van Harreveld et al., 2014).
individuals to tolerate and accept their ambivalence without actually eliminating it (Van Harreveld et al., 2014). Together, these findings suggest that ambivalent attitude holders are looking for simple order and cognitive structure, perhaps to compensate for the complexity and disorder in their attitudes, but that this simple order can be inaccurate and biased.

Cognitive Flexibility

In contrast to the large body of work in social psychology that posits that individuals turn to one-sided or simplistic thinking in an effort to reduce ambivalence or the negative affect it produces, a growing body of research in management has taken a decidedly more positive perspective. Scholars in this area have increasingly argued that ambivalence may actually be quite beneficial for individuals’ cognitive flexibility - broadening the scope of their attentional span to allow them to attend to divergent perspectives and also to engage in a balanced consideration of those perspectives (Rothman and Melwani, in press; Rees et al., 2013). Ambivalence appears to be related to two types of cognitive flexibility, increasing individuals’ (1) cognitive breadth and scope of attention, such as being open to different perspectives and unlearning what they know, and (2) motivation to engage in balanced consideration of these multiple different perspectives due to their feelings of conflict. Two notable differences between this body of work and the work reviewed above are that (1) this work is largely found in research on emotional ambivalence and not attitudinal ambivalence and (2) that negative affect has not been shown to drive these effects on flexibility. Research in this area is also largely from organizational scholars.

(1) Cognitive breadth and scope of attention. Utilizing a variety of different research methodologies, management research offers compelling empirical evidence that ambivalence can broaden individuals’ attention span. Experimental research by Fong (2006), for instance, demonstrates that experiencing emotional ambivalence (simultaneously happy and sad relative to
happiness or sadness alone) expands attentional breadth, thus increasing creativity as indicated by the number of distant associations made in a conceptual insight task. Fong (2006) suggests that the mechanism underlying this effect is that emotional ambivalence is an unusual or atypical state, signaling that the individual is in an unusual environment. Specifically, “[ambivalence] signals that it may be necessary or adaptive to process stimuli in this environment in a flexible, multifaceted way, and to be on the watch for new associations” (p. 1019).

Other experimental research by management scholars demonstrates that individuals experiencing emotional ambivalence have a broader attentional focus. Specifically, Rees and colleagues (2013) found that individuals primed to feel emotional ambivalence (simultaneously happy and sad) were more likely in a subsequent task to seek and be motivated to consider both positive and negative feedback about a potential job candidate in comparison to happy participants who were more likely to seek positive than negative feedback. In another experiment, emotionally ambivalent individuals were more likely to seek advice from peer advisors on an estimation task relative to either happy or sad participants, suggesting they were more open to alternative perspectives. Further unpacking the mechanism underlying these results, Rees and colleagues (2013) suggest that for emotionally ambivalent individuals, the simultaneous experience of happiness and sadness should signal that the environment is both safe (based on feelings of happiness) and problematic (based on feelings of sadness), thus priming openness to divergent perspectives.5

Organizational field research additionally demonstrates that ambivalence is used as a tool to increase individuals’ receptivity to organizational messages. Pratt and Barnett (1997) found that Amway distributors attempted to generate ambivalence among recruits to make them more open to new ideas. Although indirect, other psychological research also suggests that ambivalent attitudes are more prone to change when attacked (e.g., Bassili, 1996), which is likely to focus individuals’ attention on the attitude, and is an indication that ambivalent individuals are open to alternative perspectives.5
more receptive to Amway messages. Specifically, Amway veteran distributors strategically induced ambivalence in their new recruits to facilitate their recruits’ letting go of preexisting assumptions about the world and their place in it (e.g., that their non-Amway bosses do care about them). For instance, they used language that induced in recruits’ intense conflicting emotions; excitement about specific and tangible dreams and desires and dissatisfaction, fear, and doubt about their current lives. These ambivalent feelings motivate unlearning in the new recruits, which is a “process of discarding obsolete and misleading knowledge” (p. 82), thus allowing these recruits to develop new responses and mental maps, and for flexible changes in their thinking. Plambeck and Weber (2009) further theorize that having ambivalent attitudes towards the enlargement of the European Union led CEOs to be more receptive to additional information from others in the organization; to consider a broader spectrum of information, and to be motivated to engage in more distant search for information before making strategic decisions.

(2) Motivation to engage in balanced consideration of multiple perspectives. Recent research also offers compelling empirical evidence that ambivalence leads to a more balanced consideration of different perspectives. For instance, Rees and colleagues’ experimental research (2013) shows that emotionally ambivalent participants are more likely to not only seek, but also weigh and incorporate alternative perspectives (e.g., others’ advice) while making numerical estimations, relative to both happy and sad participants, resulting in more accurate forecasts. In addition, recent experimental and survey research in an organization suggests that thinking about an ambivalent relationship at work is associated with greater perspective taking, or an attempt to try and understand how things look from the partner’s perspective perhaps to reduce feelings of guilt triggered by their ambivalence (Melwani and Rothman, 2015). Meyerson (2001) also links
ambivalence with perspective taking when she describes a senior vice president of a financial firm who was ambivalent about the privileges of office, enjoying her own but perceiving that the distribution of the privileges was unfair to other women and minorities. Presumably as a result of feeling conflicted, and taking the perspective of these others, she (as a “tempered radical”) responded to the needs of working parents with more creative solutions, offering more flexible work arrangements to accommodate their family obligations.

Rothman and Melwani (2016) recently suggest, in their theorizing about the functions of emotional ambivalence, that it may be this very experience of conflict and contradiction inherent in the state of ambivalence that motivates the balanced processing of divergent perspectives. That is, feelings of conflict and contradiction may be a critical mechanism explaining why ambivalent emotions have these effects on flexible thinking. Along with other scholars studying emotional ambivalence (e.g., Fong, 2006; Rees et al., 2013), they utilize the affect-as-information model (Schwarz and Clore, 1983) to theorize about why emotional ambivalence should increase cognitive flexibility. Specifically, they suggest that because emotional ambivalence provides contradictory and conflicting signals to individuals, it should alert them to the complex and contradictory elements in their environment; drawing their attention to divergent perspectives and the conflict inherent in the ambivalent state should also motivate a balanced consideration of that information (Rothman and Melwani, in press).  

**Behavioral Inflexibility**

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6 Rothman and Melwani (in press) note that these arguments are consistent with other research on psychological conflict, which have also suggested that conflict may be the engine that motivates other forms of cognitive flexibility such as integrative complexity and creativity. For instance, internal conflict has been suggested as a mechanism explaining why bicultural individuals who are equally identified with both cultures and who experience greater conflict between their cultures are more integratively complex than those with a clear preference for one culture over another and who thus experience less conflict (Tadmor, Tetlock and Peng, 2009). In addition, related research on mind-body dissonance – when bodily expressions contradict mental states (Huang and Galinsky, 2011), paradoxical frames (Miron-Spektor, Gino and Argote, 2011) allude to the fact that the inherent conflict in these states is the engine that motivates creativity, and research on the attenuation of confirmatory thinking patterns shows that this can be driven by nonconscious goal conflicts (Kleiman and Hassin, 2013).
Research on ambivalence in psychology and management has also examined a range of outcomes that we think can best be described as indicating behavioral inflexibility, including (1) behavioral paralysis and (2) resistance to change and avoidance.

(1) **Behavioral paralysis.** Ambivalence can also create behavioral paralysis. For instance, in a study of organizational change at Lego, Lüscher and Lewis (2008) found that managers who experienced the fundamental dilemma of delegation, in which they simultaneously empower employees while also losing their own control and efficiency, were more likely to experience managerial ambivalence, and this led them to be paralyzed. Paralysis, of course, should largely be considered a negative outcome of ambivalence. However, as we note below, some management scholars consider inaction as the seed for positive outcomes (Pratt and Doucet, 2000; Pratt and Pradies, 2011; Rothman and Wiesenfeld, 2007; Weick, 1998; 2001).

(2) **Resistance to change.** Considering the strong evidence that ambivalence is a common reaction to change and personal transition (Larsen et al. 2001), it is somewhat surprising that relatively few papers link ambivalence and change in management research. In a notable exception examining change in public service organizations in the United Kingdom, Vince and Broussine (1996) found that managers reacted to changes in structure and financial constraints with emotional ambivalence (excitement and fear, hatred and hope) and this led them to act defensively, suppressing action in support of the change or not acknowledging the reality of change. Piderit (2000) further describes how a manager’s ambivalence (i.e., initial supportive attitude matched by contradictory negative emotions and intentions) yielded resistance, neglect and avoidance. She suggested that because it would be difficult for people to articulate their negative emotional responses to change, it might cause them to turn inward and work through their ambivalence alone, or even avoid engaging with the subject entirely.
While empirical research on the mechanisms linking ambivalence with behavioral inflexibility is sparse, it has been suggested that ambivalence may make it challenging to reach a decision because it creates uncertainty, making it difficult to evaluate choices, take action, or form opinions, thus increasing the likelihood of paralysis (Sincoff, 1990), or the incapacity to act. Indeed, recent empirical evidence demonstrates that manipulations of mixed feelings increase decision delay (Nohlen, van Harreveld, van der Pligt, et al., 2015), suggesting that there is reason to believe that effects of ambivalence on behavioral inflexibility, like cognitive inflexibility, are also driven by ambivalence-induced negative affect.

Behavioral Flexibility

Perhaps surprisingly given the above review, some research suggests that individuals and organizations may make more productive use of ambivalence and become more behaviorally flexible and adaptable when they embrace rather than avoid or attempt to quickly resolve their ambivalence. This insight is especially evident in management scholarship, which has theorized about, and started to uncover examples of organizations productively using ambivalence, and even training individuals to use their ambivalence to not only increase individual adaptability in decision making (e.g., reducing escalation of commitment; Rothman and Melwani, in press), but also collective or group adaptability (e.g., increasing mindful organizing; Vogus et al., 2014).

Importantly, our review of extant work suggests that behavioral flexibility takes on slightly different manifestations depending on whether one is looking at the individual, interpersonal, or collective level of analysis. Respectively, these responses are: (1) openness to change and reduced escalation of commitment; (2) interpersonal adaptability; and (3) collective wisdom.

(1) Individual openness to change / reduced escalation of commitment. Much research on attitude ambivalence in psychology emphasizes the “weakness” of ambivalent attitudes,
including effects such as greater susceptibility to change (Armitage & Conner, 2000; Bassili, 1996) and lower attitude-behavior consistency (Armitage, 2003; Fabrigar, MacDonald & Wegener, 2005; Jonas, Diehl, and Broemer, 1997). The assumption appears to be that such openness to change is not a good thing. By contrast, management scholarship seems to view such openness to change in a more positive light, as reflecting flexibility of action. For instance, Weick (2004) was perhaps the first to posit that networks that embrace doubt and knowing can weaken the conditions that give rise to excessive commitment and escalation toward a course of action because it leads people to treat commitments as more reversible, more tentative, and providing a justification for change (i.e., to stay agile). More recent theoretical work by Rothman and Melwani (in press) has focused on unpacking the psychological mechanism by which leaders’ emotional ambivalence may reduce their escalating commitment towards a failed course of action, and by implication, increase openness to change. Specifically, they suggest that emotional ambivalence not only inhibits a rush to action (which may be viewed as a short-term paralysis), but as noted above, also increases the likelihood that leaders will consider a broader and more balanced set of relevant alternatives. With more alternative options in mind, they will be able to disengage from or reduce the strength of their initial decision commitment to any one course of action, and thus be more open to change course. Such dynamics resonate with recent study of the enlargement of the European Union. Here, Plambeck and Weber (2009) find that CEOs who ambivalently evaluated enlargement were indeed more open to change, and led their organizations in actions that they perceived to be broader, more novel (e.g., completely new for the organization), and riskier (e.g., creating new subsidiaries).

More generally, Amway distributors have also been shown to generate and use ambivalence to engender greater adaptability and openness to change in their new recruits.
Specifically, Pratt and Barnett (1997) show how Amway veterans help recruits make dramatic breaks with their prior identities via simultaneously inducing excitement (discussing dreams and depicting a future self’s lifestyle and family) and fear (the unreliability of corporate America, worsening economic conditions) through language and techniques that produce increased involvement in organizational activities that build their Amway distributorships (Pratt and Barnett, 1997).

(2) Interpersonal Adaptability. In a related stream of research, Kang and Shaver (2004) find that individuals who tend to experience emotions that are broad in range and well differentiated (e.g., emotional complexity) are more attentive to their own and others’ feelings and thoughts, more adaptable in interactions, more open to experience, and cognitively complex. Ambivalence has also been shown to help individuals adapt to a new cultural context. In a field study of international MBA students, Molinsky (2013) found that ambivalence operated as an intermediate step that bridged deep conflict to adaptation. That is, students were able to incorporate new behaviors into their cultural repertoire that were inconsistent with their prior culturally ingrained values and beliefs; the conflict inherent in their ambivalence motivated a willingness to question and reconsider current or past interpersonal behavior (Molinsky, 2013).

(3) Collective Adaptability. Following Meacham (1990), Weick (1998, 2004) posits that the attitude of wisdom, which is “how knowledge is held and how it is put to use … without excessive confidence or excessive caution … balancing between knowing and doubting” (Meacham, 1990, 185, 187, 210 cited in Weick, 1998) arises from ambivalence (Weick, 2001) and is critical for navigating and embracing oppositional forces. Extending his work, management scholars further suggest that behavioral flexibility stems from wisdom (Pradies and
Pratt, 2016). For instance, there are now a number of examples of organizations generating and using wisdom to facilitate adaptation and adaptability (Weick, 1998, 2004).

Weick observes that an attitude of wisdom - and its simultaneous embrace of knowing and not knowing – is inherently ambivalent and increases the adaptability of wildland firefighters. Specifically, his research on firefighters shows that they are trained to experience ambivalence by engaging fires warily and do so only once they have located escape routes, safety zones, lookouts, and communication links (Gleason, 1991; Weick, 1996). Whereas lookouts and communication links imply knowing and knowability of a fire, escape routes and safety zones treat that knowledge tentatively in the event that a retreat may be necessary, thus engendering ambivalence. Wildland firefighters also follow the maxim “don’t hand over a fire in the heat of the day,” thus exhibiting an attitude of wisdom by acknowledging the unknowable, unpredictable dynamics of uncontrolled wildland fires that are even more manifest in the heat of the day, and pairing that acknowledgement with the knowledge-based practice of handing the fire over at a different time when the situation is more predictable, and thus more knowable (Weick, 1998, 2004). Schulman (1993) shows similar dynamics in control room operators of the Diablo Canyon nuclear reactor. These operators refer to their ambivalence (i.e., embrace of knowing and not knowing) as conceptual slack. Specifically, they hold a diverse set of theories and assumptions about technology and production processes that act as a hedge against their incomplete knowledge regarding failure modes (Schulman, 1993), and that allow for more adaptive responses such as rapidly revising critical policies and procedures and otherwise fostering higher quality interdepartmental collaboration and coordination.

Recent theorizing by Vogus and colleagues (Vogus et al., 2014) suggests that mindful organizing processes may be an important mechanism by which emotional ambivalence
(especially the simultaneous experience of doubt and hope) facilitates the ability of High
Reliability Organizations (HROs) to be able to navigate their trying conditions in a nearly error-
free manner. Specifically, ambivalence is thought to facilitate a set of mindful behaviors that
enable capturing discriminatory detail and making novel distinctions, thus allowing for better
detection of weak signals of danger (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld, 1999). Ambivalence is
theorized to prime a mode of questioning existing knowledge, to generate preoccupation with
failure, a reluctance to simplify interpretations, a breadth of attention, and receptivity to
alternative perspectives that are critical for more rapid detection and correction of errors and
unexpected events (Vogus, et al., 2014) and thus for sustaining error-free action in HROs. This
careful questioning of existing assumptions can delay action, but also produces a more nuanced
picture of a situation and can thus point to more appropriate eventual action (e.g., Schulman,
1993; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007).

Providing some suggestive empirical support for these theoretical ideas, research on high-
performing nursing units (Benner, Tanner, and Chesla, 1996) illustrates how an organization
embracing ambivalence can foster mindful organizing. These units assign the most medically
challenging patients to the least experienced nurses, whose knowledge is infused with doubt
(inducing ambivalence), thus making it easier for these individuals to ask for help. This
arrangement frees more senior colleagues to act as resources and to be more cognizant of the
junior nurses and their needs, thus increasing mindfulness, wisdom, and adaptability within the
unit. There is strong theoretical reason to believe that cognitive flexibility, which stems from
emotional ambivalence, fosters flexible and adaptive behavior from individuals and collectives.
However, further empirical research is needed that directly tests these mechanisms.

**Emotional and Physical Inflexibility**
Most of the research that focuses on the degree to which ambivalence leads to inflexible (e.g., rigid) or more flexible (e.g., adaptive) responses or outcomes is largely focused on the psychological experience of ambivalence by a single entity (e.g., an individual, an organizational agent), and that is true in this section as well. However, some of the work in this section also focuses on ambivalence experienced and/or expressed by an entity in response to another individual (e.g., relational ambivalence) and in interaction with another entity. This response therefore starts to provide a bridge to the second dimension of outcomes of ambivalence that we review next, namely, disengagement-engagement related outcomes. Specifically, ambivalence has been shown to be related to psychopathology, and reduced well-being in individuals. We view these as indications of inflexibility to the extent that they tend be associated with less resilience, which refers to “successful adaptation or the absence of a pathological outcome following exposure to stressful or potentially traumatic life events or life circumstances” (Seery, Holman, and Silver, 2010: 1025). At the same time, ambivalence has also been shown to induce reduced physical health when seeking support from ambivalent friends, and to reduce the physical health of others one has relationships with. We view these responses as indications of inflexibility as well, but it is notable that it is experienced in the context of a relationship.

(1) Psychopathology. Since its inception as a term by Bleuler (1911) and later by Freud (1917) and Horney (1945), ambivalence has been studied as a component of a varied set of mental health conditions, including schizophrenia, neurosis, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (see Sincoff, 1990, for a review). For example, obsessive compulsive personalities, who tend to view their ambivalent feelings and attitudes as major weaknesses, also tend to combat their ambivalence by demanding either-or, black or white – in addition to positive – responses to all experiences (Sincoff, 1990), thus leading to less flexibility in perception. In
addition, Sincoff (1990) describes how ambivalent object relations can lead to increased rates of felt depression, guilt, and worthlessness when ambivalence is highly internalized. For example, mourning at the death of a loved one can turn into depression as ambivalent feelings are left unresolved (Freud, 1917).

(2) Reduced psychological and physical health and well-being. Well-being also appears to suffer as a result of experiencing ambivalence about one’s goals, defined as experiencing both the desire to achieve and to not achieve a goal. In one study, undergraduates who felt more ambivalent about their goals visited the health center more often than did students who felt less ambivalent (Emmons and King, 1988). One explanation for this effect is that feeling ambivalent about one’s goals (e.g., feeling unhappy if one succeeds) may inhibit action towards those goals, which can lead to the eventual development of psychosomatic problems (Pennebaker, 1985). Indeed, Emmons and King (1988) found that in support of Pennebaker’s (1985) model of inhibition, ambivalence leads to less activity directed at the goal and to more time spent thinking about the goal; more inhibition of behavior and increased rumination. These processes were shown to correlate with reduced well-being, including negative affect, neuroticism, anxiety and depression, and in some cases somatization (e.g., headaches, chest pains, muscle pains, dizziness; Emmons and King, 1988). In a cross-sectional study, research also demonstrates that feeling emotional ambivalence in one’s intergenerational relationships (offspring and mothers) also reduces psychological well-being, specifically, life satisfaction and depression (Fingerman, Pitzer, Lefkowitz, Birditt, and Mroczek, 2008). The authors speculate the mechanism is that people desire a positive connection in these relationships.

Relatedly, having ambivalent relationships has been shown to cause a wide range of adverse physical effects for individuals, including increased ambulatory blood pressure during
daily life (Holt-Lunstad, Uchino, and Smith, 2003), cellular aging (Uchino et al., 2012),
coronary-artery calcification (Uchino, Smith and Berg, 2014), heightened physiological arousal
and cardiac activity (e.g., Hold-Lunstad, Uchino, Smith and Hicks, 2007; Reblin, Ucino, and
Smith, 2010). Ambivalent relationships may even be more detrimental than simple negative
relationships. For instance, ambulatory systolic blood pressure (SBP) has been shown to be
highest when participants are interacting (e.g., conversing) with individuals, such as friends,
immediate family, and coworkers, they rate as normally feeling ambivalent toward compared to
those toward whom they feel primarily positive, indifferent, or even primarily negative (Holt-
Lunstad, et al., 2003). These findings are important considering the prognostic relevance of SBP
in predicting cardiovascular disorders. Holt-Lunstad and colleagues (2003) speculate that this
effect may occur due to increased interpersonal stress experienced when interacting with
ambivalent relationship partners. Ambivalent relationships are presumably more complex than
even negative relationship partners. They are perhaps less easily avoided, discounted, or
predictable, and may require heightened attention and effort when interacting, which may be
associated with cardiovascular responses. However, research is needed to examine the possible
mechanisms underlying these effects, such as vigilance, controllability, or interpersonal stress.

Importantly, in cross-sectional research by Fingerman and colleagues (2008), health
related effects also stemmed from the partner’s ambivalence rather than from the individual’s
own ambivalence about the relationship. For example, when offspring feel greater emotional
ambivalence towards their mothers, their mothers experience poorer health and when fathers feel
greater emotional ambivalence for their child, offspring report poorer physical health. Research
is needed that tests these effects in non-cross sectional ways, and that examines the mechanisms,
as the authors note that it is possible the effects go in the opposite direction.
Emotional and Physical Flexibility

Despite these costs for psychological well-being and physical health, there is also evidence that ambivalence can be beneficial for psychological and physical resilience. While negative thoughts and emotions following a negative life event are assumed, when positive thoughts and emotions are also experienced—thus creating overall ambivalence—individuals have been shown to successfully adapt to the stressor or event, which is an important component of negative event recovery and well-being.

(1) Psychological resilience. Larsen and colleagues (Larsen, Hemenover, Norris, and Cacioppo, 2003) have even proposed in their co-activation model of health that experiencing positive emotions simultaneously with negative emotions - emotional ambivalence - may be optimal for well being during difficult situations, helping people develop a strategy of “taking the good with the bad”, which allows them to confront and process the negative events that led to their negative emotions; to face these negative life events and gain insight and meaning into them, and subsequently to experience enhanced well-being (Larsen et al., 2003; Folkman and Moskowitz, 2000). Davis and colleagues (Davis, Zautra and Smith, 2004) further suggest that one pathway to resilience across the adult lifespan, may be the “ability to maintain affective complexity in the face of life’s difficulties” (p. 1155).

Direct support for this line of reasoning comes from a handful of studies showing that the co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions is positively associated with psychological well-being. Adler and Hershfield (2012) demonstrate in a naturalistic longitudinal study of psychotherapy patients in an outpatient clinic that experiencing happiness and sadness simultaneously is associated with improvement in psychological well-being one assessment point later (Adler and Hershfield, 2012). These authors reported that only the narratives from patients
that indicated the experience of a blend of happiness and sadness preceded enhanced psychological well-being but that other emotion combinations did not. Bonnano and Keltner (1997) further demonstrate in a non-clinical sample that bereaved adults who expressed positive emotions when talking about their recently deceased spouse experienced reduce grief over time. Coifman, Bonnano and Rafaeli (2007) also showed that participants who experienced a smaller negative correlation between positive and negative emotions also experienced greater resilience to loss.

This literature describes the experience of mixed feelings (cf. emotional complexity) during times of stress as being closely intertwined with resilience; actually serving as one of the important underlying mechanisms explaining resilient individuals’ adaptation to hardship, not only as an adaptive outgrowth of resilience but also further promoting overall adaptation. For instance, Ong, Bergemen, Bisconti and Wallace (2006) examined the differences distinguishing high-resilient widows from their less well-functioning peers. Their findings suggest that these high-resilient widows (who had achieved positive outcomes despite adverse experiences) were more likely to experience a range of positive emotions (e.g., cheerful, peaceful, happy) and negative (e.g., anxious, worried, depressed) emotions throughout the bereavement process, and to maintain partial separation of these positive and negative emotional states while under stress.

(2) Physical resilience. Ambivalence has also been shown to support physical well-being. Although the precise mechanisms why remain unknown, a 10 year longitudinal experience-sampling study across the lifespan found that frequent experiences of mixed emotions (co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions) were strongly associated with long-term health covering a variety of bodily systems, as measured by self-reports of physical symptoms across the sensory, cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, and genitourinary systems, and that it even
attenuated typical age-related health declines (Hershfield et al., 2013). In addition, research has demonstrated that adding positivity to otherwise negative events helps the cardiovascular system (e.g., blood pressure, heart rate) recover more quickly (Tugade and Fredrickson, 2004; Tugade, Fredrickson and Feldman Barrett, 2004) and can reduce depression (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, and Larkin, 2003).

Scholars have speculated about the mechanism underlying these relationships, theorizing that when individuals experience emotional ambivalence they are able to make meaning of negative events in their lives, thus allowing them to become more resilient because they can confront and process those events (Larsen et al., 2003; Adler and Hershfield, 2012) but future research is needed to directly test whether meaning-making is a mediating link between emotional ambivalence and well-being. In their Dynamic Model of Affect, Davis and colleagues (Davis, Zautra, and Smith, 2004) argue that adding positive to negative affect inherent in chronic pain situations can help improve individuals’ ability to cope with the long-term pain by widening individuals’ affective space (i.e., decreasing the inverse relationship between positive and negative affect; Zautra et al., 2002; Zautra et al., 2000; Coifman, Bonanno and Rafaeli, 2007; which counters the negative effects of stress such as tunnel vision and allows the individual to increase processing complexity, thereby improving adaptation and well-being (Zautra, 2003). Ambivalence following a negative event is also thought to aid coping by increasing positive reappraisal of the situation (Fredrickson, 2001) and by boosting problem-focused coping (Folkman & Moscovitz, 2000). In addition, a more basic mechanism has been suggested; that the co-occurrence of positive emotions mitigates the maladaptive physiological impact of negative emotions (Hershfield, Scheibe, Sims and Carstensen, 2013). Adding positivity to otherwise negative events helps people physiologically, aiding the cardiovascular system (e.g.,
blood pressure, heart rate) recover more quickly (Fredrickson and Levenson, 1999; Tugade and Fredrickson, 2004; Tugade et al., 2004). However, future experimental research using physiological measures and field research using experience sampling is needed to fully test these mechanisms.

Our review of the ambivalence-(in)flexibility relationship suggests that most psychological research on attitude ambivalence predicts highly inflexible responses. Paralleling dissonance-based arguments, which suggest that holding two inconsistent cognitions leads to a negative state until dissonance is resolved (Festinger, 1957), one of the most prevalent themes within these ambivalence literatures is that the motivation to reduce the negative affect or psychological discomfort produced by ambivalent attitudes (Haas et al., 1991; Van Harreveld et al., 2015) drives the inflexible cognitive, behavioral and resilience-related responses to experiencing ambivalence. Also paralleling dissonance-based selective exposure hypotheses, in which people experiencing dissonance are expected to avoid counter-attitudinal information while seeking pro-attitudinal information (Festinger, 1964), ambivalent individuals are also expected to “think [themselves] toward a univalent attitude” (Van Harreveld et al., 2014, p. 1674) because they are presumably motivated to directly reduce ambivalence (Ashforth, Rogers, Pratt and Pradies, 2014; Festinger, 1964; Heider, 1946; see Van Harreveld, van der Pligt and de Liver (2009) for a review) and the negative affect it produces. In short, the experience of conflicting thoughts and emotions are thought be uncomfortable and to produce negative affect, and thus to shed this discomfort, individuals tend to drop one “side” of the conflict in favor of the other. However, at the same time, scholarship on emotional ambivalence (e.g., Rothman and Melwani, in press) suggests that it may be this very experience of conflict and contradiction
inherent in the state of ambivalence that not only increases attention to divergent perspectives but also motivates the balanced processing of those divergent perspectives.

Moving along the Inflexibility-Flexibility Continuum: A Discussion of Key Moderators

Research is not very clear yet on the moderators that help us predict when individuals will respond to ambivalence more flexibly. From our review we can glean at least three core conditions that may motivate people to keep rather than eliminate their oppositional thoughts and feelings, or help reduce the negative affect they produce, and thus be able to harness ambivalence for increased flexibility.

1. **Boundary spanning roles and structures.** Guidance and intervention from outsiders such as boundary spanners who are not part of the core group (e.g., Lüscher and Lewis, 2008) or cross-departmental meetings that cross organizational boundaries (e.g., Schulman, 1993) can help individuals and groups better embrace ambivalence by reducing the tendency for groups to force themselves toward univalent ideas or solutions, thus increasing the likelihood that they flexibly reassess their situation and act accordingly. These dynamics are observed with how veterans coach and socialize newcomers at Amway (Pratt and Barnett, 1997), formal “sparring sessions” where outside action researchers challenged individuals and teams at Lego (Lüscher and Lewis, 2008), and the interdepartmental meetings at Diablo Canyon where existing procedures are actively and regularly reconsidered and renegotiated (Schulman, 1993). In each case the intervention from boundary spanners made people not only more likely to experience ambivalence but also more open to their felt ambivalence, thus yielding more flexible thinking, and greater adaptive behavior.

2. **Psychologically safe environments.** The experience of ambivalence is also more likely to produce positive outcomes like behavioral change and (un)learning in psychologically safe
rather than unsafe environments (Pratt and Barnett, 1997). Psychologically safe environments enable people to take an interpersonal risk in the form of new behaviors or speaking up, both of which create the conditions for change (Edmondson, 1999; Pratt and Barnett, 1997; Schein, 1987). By contrast, low levels of psychological safety are associated with embarrassment and fear, which seem likely to channel ambivalence towards shutting down new, potentially risky behaviors. As Pratt and Barnett (1997: 73) show, Amway recruiters attempt to prompt behavioral change by not only evoking ambivalent emotions and cognitions, but by simultaneously “portraying intimacy and vulnerability […], as well as legitimacy and competence.” They even place chairs in such a way that people can find the exit easily and leave if they feel like they need to do so.

3. Not Having to Choose. Psychological scholars have argued that attitude ambivalence becomes unpleasant when one is forced to commit to one side of the issue (Van Harreveld, Rutjens, Rotteveel, Nordgren, & van der Pligt, 2009) but is less unpleasant when not forced to choose. More specifically, it is the feeling of the need to choose between opposing orientations, rather than their existence, that makes ambivalence unpleasant (Van Harreveld et al., 2015). Specifically, Van Harreveld, Rutjen and colleagues (2009) found that being forced to choose to support one side of an issue about which one has ambivalent attitudes leads to increased uncertainty about the consequences of one’s choice, and in turn, observable increases in physiological arousal (as measured by galvanic skin response). Thus, ambivalence is experienced as uncomfortable only when a choice has to be made, a circumstance in which people worry about the uncertain consequences of their decision. However, perhaps surprisingly given the assumption that ambivalence increases negative affect in general - and critical to our understanding of when ambivalence can be functional - when there is no need to choose,
ambivalence is no more stressful, and elicits just as little physiological arousal as holding an univalent attitude. In fact, ambivalent individuals who are not forced to choose feel just as much positive affect and even less negative affect, including less regret, anxiety, and fear, than individuals with univalent attitudes (van Harreveld et al., 2009). Very recent psychological research further suggests that when people are not forced to choose, they may even develop ambivalence as a self protective strategy in the face of uncertain and negative outcomes; cultivating ambivalence about a target they are uncertain they can obtain (e.g., a coveted job) in order to protect their feelings in the event that they fail to get what they want. Such ambivalence provides what Reich and Wheeler (2016) call an evaluative hedge; buffering their feelings from failure to achieve their desired target.

Although future research is needed to systematically test this prediction, when ambivalence is experienced in a context when one is not forced to choose, it appears that individuals are less likely to experience the affective costs of such contradiction, leaving open the possibility that they can reap the information benefits of experiencing this contradictory state because they are less focused on and motivated to reduce it.

Disengagement-Engagement Responses to Experiencing and Observing Ambivalence

While flexibility-inflexibility appears to have received the bulk of scholarly attention to date, it is important to note that a second, fundamental dimension of responses to ambivalence concerns disengagement-engagement from other people. Although one can argue that ambivalence is always in relation to something (e.g., a person or idea), this dimension is most visible when scholars explicitly explore felt ambivalence within a relationship or expressed ambivalence in a social interaction. Thus, in our review, we also delineate between two types of engagement in a relationship. Research on what we call “relational (dis)engagement” focuses on
how feeling ambivalent can lead people to positively engage, negatively engage, or disengage from others they are in relationships with, whereas research on what we call “social (dis)engagement” focuses on how expressing ambivalence in social interactions can provoke others who observe this expression to either positively engage, negatively engage, or disengage from their ambivalent interaction partner.

In terms of relational (dis)engagement, some of the earliest uses of the term ambivalence involved ambivalence in relationships; early work in psychodynamics (e.g. Freud 1950/1920) and developmental psychology (e.g., Bowlby, 1982) centered around conflicting emotions in emotionally intimate relationships, such as between parents and children, close friends, or couples. In this tradition, a long held perspective is that ambivalence should be viewed within the broader context of neuroses, often stemming from the parent-child relationship (Horney, 1945). A focus on ambivalence in these relationships continues today in psychology (e.g., Uchino, Smith and Berg, 2014), but they also extend to other types of relationships as well, such as between colleagues (Ingram and Roberts, 2000; Melwani & Rothman, 2015), supervisors and subordinates (Duffy et al., 2002), and employees and customers (Pratt and Doucet, 2000).

In terms of social (dis)engagement, a more recent body of work in management has started to examine the expression of emotional ambivalence, primarily focusing on the social consequences of expressing ambivalence in social interactions such as negotiations and emphasizing how expressed emotional ambivalence is an important piece of social information that is critical in shaping and guiding observers’ judgments and behavior (hence the use of “social” (dis)engagement) (Rothman, 2011; Rothman & Northcraft, 2015). In the first study to demonstrate these effects, Rothman (2011) showed that people can reliably distinguish the nonverbal expression of ambivalence from the nonverbal expression of related emotions
(sadness) as well as unrelated emotions (e.g., anger). Further, an ambivalent actor was rated as significantly more ambivalent than happy, angry, sad, guilty, sympathetic or fearful.

Interestingly, research on the effects of ambivalence on both relational and social (dis)engagement show largely similar patterns. In both early and current research, experiencing ambivalence in relationships has been found to cause people to react by “moving away” (i.e., disengaging or distancing) from the target of their ambivalence, “moving against” (i.e., aggression toward or negatively engaging with), “moving towards” (i.e., becoming emotional closer to) others, or alternating between two of these responses (i.e., vacillation; Horney, 1945; Pratt and Doucet, 2000). Similarly, in recent research, expressing ambivalence in social interactions has been found to cause observers to react by “moving away” (i.e., negative evaluations and distrust), “moving against” (i.e., dominance and aggression) but also “moving towards” (i.e., empowerment and integrative problem solving). There is not yet evidence that it causes observers to vacillate, however. These effects occur through the inferences that another person’s expression of ambivalence elicits in an observer.

As evidenced by this typology, what is deemed a negative versus a positive response is not as straightforward as with the inflexibility-flexibility dimension. Indeed, while disengagement (e.g., moving away) is often viewed negatively, engagement can take three forms: moving toward, moving against, and vacillating. It is only the first of these, moving toward, that is consistently viewed as a positive outcome, whereas moving against and vacillation are consistently viewed as more negative outcomes.

Importantly, identifying this distinction within engaging responses to ambivalence - between (positive) moving toward and (negative) moving against responses to ambivalence led us to uncover an important moderator of these effects, which is the extent to which the
ambivalent person has “concern for others”. Ambivalence can yield either positive engaging responses or negative engaging responses, and which of these reactions materializes appears to depend on whether ambivalence is coupled with concern for others (other-concern) or concern for self (self-concern). We highlight this distinction explicitly when we review the literature on negative and positive engaging responses to ambivalence below.

**Disengagement**

**Relational Disengagement.** Bushman and Holt-Lunstad’s research (2009: 769-770) illustrates how ambivalence can lead people to disengage from the people they feel ambivalence towards. Specifically, participants with ambivalent relationships reported using greater distancing strategies and experiencing less intimacy in these relationships relative to supportive relationships. That is, individuals tried to limit intimacy and sought greater separation within the ambivalent relationship (e.g., shortening interactions or avoiding self-disclosure), and these effects were partially mediated by having mixed and conflicted thoughts and feelings about that friend relative to a supportive friend. These results suggest that ambivalent relationships which are characterized by the experience of contradictions can yield different levels of mixed, torn, and conflicted feelings, and that distancing within ambivalent relationships is a function of the ambivalent relationship causing mixed feelings. As noted previously, individuals might also disengage when discussing a positive event (e.g., promotion) with an ambivalent friend, as indicated by their low levels of physiological reactivity (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2007). Illustrating a different type of disengaged response, Bruno, Lutak and Agin (2009: 490) found that ambivalence mediated the relationship between one type of interpersonal guilt and estrangement/separation (i.e., alienation) and loneliness. Moreover, Thompson and Holmes (1996) found that
ambivalence, rather than conflict in the relationship, was a stronger predictor of whether or not romantic couples broke up.

Management research has similarly shown that individuals respond to ambivalence by moving away from their organization. Pratt and Doucet (2000) found that call center workers who experienced ambivalence became more disengaged, distancing themselves and using avoidance behaviors such as ignoring customers or escapist behaviors such as putting them on hold while an employee ordered lunch. In a complementary vein, Duffy, Ganster, and Pagon (2002) demonstrated that supportive supervision moderated the negative effects of supervisor undermining, finding that employees who perceived their supervisor as providing high support and high undermining, creating ambivalence in their employees’ relationship with them, used more counterproductive work behaviors and had lower levels of commitment and well-being.

Social Disengagement. Research by Rothman and colleagues (Belkin and Rothman, working paper; Marsh and Rothman, 2013) suggests that expressed ambivalence can lead others’ to disengage from the ambivalent individual as well, producing negative evaluations and reduced trust. Marsh and Rothman (2013) demonstrate that individuals rate ambivalent physicians as significantly lower quality and less influential than either certain or uncertain physicians. They argue that people consult experts to produce decisions and if an expert signals she lacks the ability to decide, the exact thing she is consulted for, people lose faith in her expertise. Research also demonstrates that ambivalence can signal unpredictability (Bushman and Holt-Lunstad, 2009; Belkin and Rothman, working paper) and that one is hypocritical and fickle (Meyerson and Scully, 1995), and can therefore hinder the development of interpersonal trust in relationships and business-related interactions (Belkin and Rothman, working paper). The net
result of perceived unpredictability, negative interpersonal evaluation, and lack of trust is that individuals want to disengage from the ambivalent individual.

Engagement

While research in psychology, especially in the area of romantic relationships, has suggested that ambivalence in such relationships is normal (Braiker and Kelley, 1979; Kelly, Huston, and Cate, 1985), few suggest that the presence of ambivalence can facilitate closer relationships among people. Indeed, a growing body of research on ambivalence in psychology and management has examined outcomes that can be described as indicating *self-concerned relational and social engagement*, including (1) moving against relationship partners, (2) moving against social interaction partners.

Self-Concerned Relational and Social Engagement

(1) Moving against relationship partners. Negative engagement, such as conflict, violence, undermining, and the like can also result from experiencing ambivalence towards a relationship partner. To illustrate, psychological research suggests that ambivalent attitudes towards one’s spouse are associated with greater marital discord and ultimately dissatisfaction (e.g., Jacobson, Follette and McDonald, 1982; Jacobson, Waldron and Moore, 1980; Weiss, 1976; cited in Thompson and Holmes 1996). In research on prejudice toward stigmatized minorities, Katz and Glass (1979) showed that individuals in the majority group who are often initially ambivalent towards those in the minority will seek out additional information about the minority out-group. If they observe an out-group member doing something bad or incorrectly, their attitudes will become decidedly negative toward the entire minority group (see also Bell and Esses, 2002), and they may engage in extreme derogating behavior towards them. Katz, Glass and Cohen (1973) suggest that guilt may mediate the relationship between holding
ambivalent attitudes about a particular person or group and engaging in extreme derogating behavior toward them. The function of the extreme derogating behavior is thought to be the reduction of guilt.

Negative responses to ambivalence such as moving against are also apparent in management scholarship by Pratt and colleagues. For instance, research by Pratt and Doucet (2000) found that negative or self-concerned engaging behavior can manifest as individuals engaging in disruptive behaviors (e.g., making fun of customers or the organization, yelling at others). Most recently, Vadera and Pratt (2013) have theorized that ambivalent identification can also lead to negative engagement in the form of unethical behavior such as anti-organizational workplace crimes, which ultimately move against one’s organization. Specifically, Vadera and Pratt (2013) draw upon Katz and Glass’s (1979) ambivalence amplification theory to suggest that strong ambivalent identification towards an organization can transform into an intense negative attachment with an organization. When ambivalent employees view the organization doing something that they view as wrong, inept, or otherwise unfavorable, they may “negatively engage” with their organizations via anti-organizational crimes (e.g., corporate sabotage).

(2) Moving against social interaction partners. Expressions of ambivalence can also lead individuals who observe this expression in social interaction partners to aggressively move against the ambivalent individual. It seems that the expression of ambivalence in an interaction partner provides an opportunity for – even implicitly invites – observers to dominate the social interaction, as shown in experimental research (Rothman, 2011). In a set of studies by Rothman (2011), observing the nonverbal expression of ambivalence led individuals to plan to take charge of a future decision making task with the ambivalent partner (e.g., being closed minded to their contributions) and to take advantage materially, by taking more money from an ambivalent
partner than a happy, angry, or neutral partner in an ultimatum bargaining game, where the only way to win is for your partner to lose. Rothman (2011) suggests that because individuals tend to act more dominantly towards partners whom they perceive to be submissive (Tiedens and Fragale, 2003), and because ambivalent partners are perceived as more deliberative, and in turn submissive, relative to individuals who express more singular emotions, observers take charge and take advantage of ambivalent partners, at least in distributive negotiations.

**Other Concerned Relational and Social Engagement.**

Positive engagement can also result from feeling ambivalence towards a relationship partner or observing ambivalence in a social interaction partner when ambivalence is combined with high concern for that other person. While there has been relatively less research in this area, there are some notable exceptions demonstrating that other-concern combined with ambivalence can lead to: (1) positive attitudes towards minority groups, (2) greater commitment in relationships, (3) greater trust in relationships, (4) greater collaboration in relationships, (5) greater voice and proactivity in social interactions.

1. *Positive attitudes towards minority groups.* In research on ambivalence-response-amplification (Gergen & Jones, 1963; Katz & Glass, 1979), the attitudes of individuals in majority groups (e.g., white or physically able people) towards stigmatized targets can sometimes be more extreme and polarized – either positively or negatively – than evaluations of nonstigmatized targets as a result of having ambivalent attitudes towards minority groups that have been the victim of discrimination. To resolve their ambivalence, majority members will observe the actions of minority members or gather information about them. Whether ambivalent individuals develop a decidedly negative or positive response to a minority outgroup depends on nature of the data collected about that minority outgroup. As noted above, when the data is
negative, minority members can engender decidedly strong negative attitudes and derogating behavior towards minority members by those in the majority. However, when the data is positive, ambivalence can be transformed into highly positive attitudes towards minority members, thus facilitating their engagement with one another. For example, Katz, Cohen, and Glass (1975) showed that White Americans gave more help to Black Americans when they received positive information about them (e.g., they were working their way through college); moreover, this helping behavior exceeded the help given to other White Americans with similar characteristics.

(2) Commitment in relationships. A second major perspective on positive engagement from ambivalence comes from Philip Brickman. In what he referred to as a modification of cognitive dissonance theory, Brickman (1987) argued that commitment in a relationship involves the transformation of ambivalence. Specifically, he notes that any relationship will often involve positive and negative elements. For example, being married ideally allows you an exclusive physical relationship with one person, but at the same time, involves eschewing other potential partners. Transformation of ambivalence occurs as one “binds” these positive and negative elements by making a free choice to accept both. The net result of this transformation, a commitment, reflects that commitment is sometimes experienced positively (e.g., “I am in a loving, committed relationship”) and sometimes negatively (e.g., “I would leave this relationship but I am committed”). Thus, from Brickman’s (1987) perspective, ambivalence yields positive engagement with others when individuals accept both the positive and negative aspects of relationships. In a rare empirical testing of Brickman’s ideas, Thompson and Holmes (1996) found that couples were least likely to break up (i.e., maintain their commitment) when they experienced moderate ambivalence and high commitment. Further, Bushman and Holt-Lunstad
(2009) found that people’s ambivalent relationships are relatively stable and are viewed as voluntary associations maintained primarily because of internal factors such as commitment to the relationship (rather than due to obligation or external barriers).

Work in management by Pratt and colleagues also builds from the work of Philip Brickman (1987) and demonstrates that ambivalence can increase relational commitment. For example, Pratt and Rosa (2003) build on Brickman to show how three direct selling organizations (Amway, Mary Kay, and Longaberger) intentionally recruit for and socialize members to maintain ambivalence around their work and family (e.g., remind them of both the benefits and harm of work on one’s family life) in order to increase their commitment to the organization. Specifically, these organizations tend to recruit married individuals with children so that they will be more aware of and more susceptible to work-family conflicts, which create ambivalence. However, these organizations help members transform this ambivalence into commitment through special practices designed to encourage “making workers into family” and “bringing family into work.” The former practice involves fostering family-like relationships among distributors (e.g., referring to networks of distributors as “families”). When fellow distributors are also family members, working hard building the business benefits not only the distributors, but also their new work “family.” Similarly, bringing family into work evokes similar dynamics, but here one’s actual family becomes part of one’s business and thus being successful benefits both family and business. Similar practices are also evident in Pratt and Barnett’s (1997) study of Amway recruiting where emotional ambivalence about one’s current job and lifestyle is fostered as a means of assisting recruits in “letting go” of their old job and lifestyle and committing to building their Amway distributorship. Specifically, emotional ambivalence is viewed as key to motivate the unlearning of previous habits and ideas and the
relearning new ones in order to embrace the Amway business and lifestyle, thus bolstering new employees’ commitment to Amway.

(3) Trust in relationships. Pratt and Dirks (2007) also draw upon Brickman’s (1987) research to reconceptualize trust as a consequence of accepting ambivalence in relationships. Specifically, they suggest that inherent in trust – often defined as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations or behavior of another” (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer, 1998) – is both a positive (e.g., expected beneficial future behavior) and negative (e.g., vulnerability) element that must be accepted by the trustor. When both the positive and negative elements of the relationship are accepted, trust can result. As such, they view trust as a product of ambivalence – and argue this conceptualization explains trust dynamics more than common social exchange explanations.

(4) Collaboration in relationships. Research conducted by Ingram and Roberts (2000), further suggests that ambivalent relationships – the duality of friendship with competition – within managerial networks facilitates positive engagement among managers in the Sydney hotel industry. They show benefits of having friendships with competitors (horizontal ties), including collaboration, information exchange, and mitigation of competition, all outcomes that reflect positive engagement with others and ultimately improve performance of the organization, as measured by the revenue per available room of the given hotel. They also found these relationships to be robust over time.

(5) Voice and proactivity in relationships. In a similar vein, research by Pratt and Doucet (2000) note that employees who are ambivalent may act on this ambivalence by engaging positively with their organizations or colleagues via voice, or expressing ideas and suggestions which attempt to change the status quo of the organization and improve processes. A such, voice
may initially look like “moving against” since it is an attempt to change the status quo, but it is moving against in a constructive, beneficial manner. Expressing emotional ambivalence can also empower others to engage in more constructively assertive – integrative – responses in a negotiation (Rothman & Northcraft, 2015), which is “a less extreme form of moving against where more of the positive aspects of the relationship are maintained” (Pratt and Doucet, 2000, p. 216), as well to empower subordinates to be more proactive (Rothman & Melwani, in press).

Specifically, in negotiations, proactivity and assertiveness are particularly beneficial for achieving high joint gain as they help negotiators avoid unilateral concessions and split-the-difference compromises, instead encouraging problem solving that promotes the discovery and development of agreements that integrate both parties’ wishes (Pruitt and Rubin, 1986), and benefiting both ambivalent partner and observer. Building on this insight, Rothman and Northcraft (2015) predict and find that because expressed ambivalence signals submissiveness, and thus inspires dominance/aggressive behavior in others (i.e., asserting one’s point of view; Rothman, 2011), negotiations that are able to create a cooperative tone may nudge that aggressive behavior in a prosocial direction, thus yielding constructive/prosocial assertiveness that is critical for growing (not just splitting) the pie. Indeed, these researchers found relatively higher joint outcomes in negotiations in which ambivalence (relative to neutrality or anger) was expressed and perceived submissiveness was the mechanism explaining these effects.

Similarly, Rothman and Melwani (in press) emphasize that leader expressed emotional ambivalence may be a previously unexplored social factor that increases follower proactivity, specifically empowering followers to proactively speak up and take charge in order to advance bottom-up change because it signals flexibility and openness on the part of the leader. There is some empirical evidence that ambivalence may signal that an individual is appraising and
thinking about the environment in a nuanced way, and is thus deliberative and cognitively flexible (Pillaud, Cavazza and Butera, 2013; Rothman, 2011). Thus building on this evidence, Rothman and Melwani (in press) argue that on observing the leader display ambivalence, “followers may perceive this leader as someone who is flexible and open to multiple divergent perspectives before making strategic decisions, such as both confirming and disconfirming information, and as someone who is receptive to a full range of evidence - both positive and negative - about problems at hand” (p. 18). Thus, a leader expressing ambivalence can benefit the organization by encouraging positively engaged follower actions.

Rothman and Wiesenfeld (2007) further theorize that group members who express emotional ambivalence can attenuate group conformity and motivate greater engagement by introducing uncertainty and doubt into the group’s decision making process, which conveys that the group’s problem deserves greater deliberation, thus increasing cognitively complexity and motivating information search from the group. As noted in an earlier section, Plambeck and Weber (2009) suggest CEO ambivalence can facilitate broad participation in an organization, encouraging more people to explore and express their understanding of issues and participate in finding solutions. Indeed, ambivalent CEOs can empower subunits to proactively develop their own responses to new technology (Gilbert, 2006). This empowerment allows members to engage with others in positive ways (i.e., move towards).

Engagement and Disengagement: Vacillation

Ambivalence can also elicit a combination of responses, such as moving towards and moving away, or moving towards and moving against (i.e., vacillation). We view this as an overall negative response because research suggests that it indicates an unfavorable type of attachment. Specifically, vacillation responses are illustrated by research on ambivalence in the
parent-child relationship. According to Bowlby’s (1982) theory of attachment, ambivalent relationships (a.k.a., anxious-resistant insecure) exist alongside secure, anxious-avoidant, and disorganized/disoriented ones. When children have ambivalent attachments, their behavior can be unpredictable, alternating between seeking out and resisting contact with their primary caregivers. For instance, during reunion, babies with ambivalent attachments can vacillate abruptly between angry resistance to contact and clinging contact-maintaining behavior (see also Cassidy and Berlin, 1994; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall, 1978).

Similar to Bowlby’s (1982) psychological work, managerial scholars have found that workers can vacillate. However, given its origins in developmental psychology, perhaps it is not surprising that vacillation has largely been found in relational versus social contexts. In corporate organizations, Pratt’s (2000) ethnographic study of Amway distributors found vacillation to be a primary response to ambivalence. At times, this vacillation was expressed behaviorally; for example, ambivalently identified distributors were inconsistent in their performance – at times engaged in building the business and selling products while at other times not doing much at all. While he did not posit specific mechanisms, ambivalence seemed to occur when distributors felt a combination of seekership and inadequate encapsulated sensemaking. Put another way, ambivalence occurred when individuals felt the need to improve who they were, but did not listen only to Amway distributors – who were positively inclined towards Amway as a means of improving oneself. Rather, they also listened to skeptical outsiders. Pratt and Doucet (2000) have further found that workers can vacillate -- alternately moving towards or against their organization. They argue that vacillation often occurs when ambivalence is “split” between different aspects of a relationship. Splitting is a defense mechanism where individuals non-consciously separate the positive and negative orientations so that opposition is no longer
perceived and responses are more unitary. Children, for example, resolve ambivalence about their parents by seeing one parent as “good” and the other as “bad” (Pratt and Doucet, 2000).

Splitting can also occur within the same target of ambivalence. Rowe and colleagues (2005), for example, note that poor team performance may induce sports teams and their fans to be ambivalent about the team, with discomfort avoided by splitting the admired qualities of the team from the poor performance and attributing the latter to other causes such as the coach (Rowe, Cannella, Rankin, and Gorman, 2005).

Pratt and Doucet (2000) report three types of (cognitive) splitting in their research: (1) temporal splitting, (2) current versus ideal relationship splitting, and (3) the construction of trade-offs. Temporal splitting was evident among rural doctors who expressed positive emotions about their current relationship with their organization but negative emotions about the future direction of the organization. Physicians also split their ambivalence between current and ideal relationships, talking positively about their current relationships with the organization but noting the negative aspects through talking about how things would be different in an ideal world. They also split their ambivalence by construing the ambivalent relationship with the organization as consisting of a tradeoff between the benefits of gaining economic security at the cost of professional freedom. Thus, it appears that simplified cognitions (often a sign of inflexible thinking) appear to underlie at least some vacillating in relationships.

**Moving along the Disengagement-Engagement Continuum: A Discussion of Key Moderators**

As was the case with the inflexibility-flexibility dimension, and perhaps more so, there has been little empirical and theoretical work on the conditions that are the most likely to lead to positive engagement versus negative engagement and disengagement with others in a
relationship characterized by ambivalence and in social interactions in which ambivalence is expressed. However, at least three sets of moderators seem uniquely critical for the formation of positive responses in ambivalent relationships.

1. Psychologically safe relationships and relational norms. As was the case with the inflexibility-flexibility dimension, strong, secure, and overall “safe” relationships are critical in moving from disengagement towards engagement. Such findings cut across research on relational and social engagement / disengagement. For example, in their analysis of network marketing organizations (e.g., Amway, Mary Kay, and Longaberger), Pratt and Rosa (2003) argue that the development of “family like” ties was critical to transforming ambivalence into commitment. Similarly, research finds that when social norms and expectations are competitive (e.g., earn as much for yourself as possible), individuals’ responses to observing expressions of ambivalence in their interaction partner are more negatively engaging; aggressive and dominant rather than positively engaging; proactive and assertive (Rothman, 2011). By contrast, responses to expressed ambivalence are more positive, proactively assertive and engaged and less purely aggressive when there are cooperative (e.g., find solutions that benefit both parties) social norms (Rothman and Northercraft, 2015). Further evidence that relational norms matter for transforming ambivalence into positive benefits, Ingram and Roberts (2000) found that in the context of networks of friendships among competitors in Sydney’s hotel industry, greater cohesion in those networks (i.e., the others that an actor is tied to are also tied to each other), the better organizational performance. One reason is that cohesive networks are best for norm enforcement.

2. Roles and task demands. Research also suggests that certain roles and task demands may also serve to moderate the relationship between ambivalence and (dis)engagement. Echoing the findings on safe relationships and norms, research suggests that responses to expressed
ambivalence are more positive, proactively assertive and engaged and less purely aggressive when there are integrative rather than distributive task demands (Rothman et al., 2015); that is, where it is possible to make trades and expand resources that lead to win-win solutions.\footnote{It has also been argued that observers will perceive the expression of ambivalence positively when the decision context calls for ambivalence because of its complexity. For instance, when leaders express ambivalence in the context of needing to balance competing, contradictory demands from constituents (Rothman & Melwani, in press) or when an individual is expressing ambivalence about a controversial topic (Maio & Haddock, 2004; 2010; Pillaud, Cavazza, & Butera, 2013) expressed ambivalence is considered more appropriate, and thus positively engaging, because it signals more thoughtful consideration of an issue or situation.}

Roles, especially those involving power, also play a critical role in predicting engagement vs. disengagement outcomes of ambivalence. To illustrate, negative disengaging reactions appear to occur when the individual expressing ambivalence is an “expert” whose job it is to decide (e.g., a physician making a diagnosis; Marsh et al., 2013). In this context, the division of labor is relatively clear and thus it is may be normative for the expert to show that s/he can effectively decide and act. This may help explain why ambivalent experts elicit negative disengaging reactions from observers, including judgments of reduced expert quality and influence, although future research is needed to explicitly test whether experts are judged more negatively than non-experts. In a similar vein, it has been argued that more negative disengaging reactions may also appear when the individual who is expressing ambivalence is a leader (Rothman et al., in press). In making decisions about who appears leader-like and who should emerge as leaders of groups, people use implicit assumptions about the traits, abilities, and even emotions that characterize their ideal business leaders (Epitropaki, Sy, Martin, Tram-Quon and Topakas, 2013). Ambivalent individuals are unlikely to fit these assumptions and thus are likely to be rejected as leaders, at least in the short term (Rothman et al., in press). By contrast, ambivalence outcomes appear more positive, proactively assertive and engaged and less aggressive when the ambivalent individual is a decision-making “partner,” with whom one must work interdependently to make a decision.
(e.g., a negotiation partner rather than opponent; Rothman et al., 2015). Future research is needed that explicitly manipulates roles (e.g., experts vs. novices; leaders vs. non leaders) or task demands (e.g., distributive vs. integrative; contradictory vs. simple) in the same studies.

3. Free choice. The level of free choice also appears to moderate the effects of ambivalence on engagement. In Brickman’s (1987) theory of ambivalence transformation, free choice determines whether commitments will develop (or not) from ambivalence. For example, individuals are more likely to bind the positive and negative elements of a relationship, leading to increased relational commitment, if they have the autonomy to make the decision to accept both the costs and benefits of a relationship (Pratt and Rosa, 2003). Similarly, in their work on interpersonal trust, Pratt and Dirks (2006:122) note that individuals must “enter a relationship of their own free will….One cannot be forced to commit to someone.”

It is notable that in the context of relationships, “free choice” or accepting one’s positive and negative (ambivalent) experiences freely and thus keeping ambivalence intact is key for ambivalence to yield engagement in relationships, such as increased commitment and trust, and thus promoting stability. By contrast, in the context of individual decision making, we reported that “not being forced to choose between positive and negative alternatives,” is key for attenuating the detrimental effect of ambivalence on physiological arousal, uncertainty about the consequences of one’s choice, and negative emotions such as regret, anxiety and fear (Van Harreveld, et al., 2009), states that are known to create inflexibility. Indeed, while both “free choice” and “not being forced to choose” allow ambivalence to be maintained, they appear to have different implications for the effects of ambivalence on engagement and flexibility. On the one hand, “free choice” in relationships allows for ambivalence to yield increased consistency and stability within relationships, which are typically considered positive outcomes in that
context (and which seem at odds with the notion of flexibility). On the other hand, “not being forced to choose” may promote more flexibility in decision making, typically considered a positive outcome in that context (and which seems at odds with consistency and stability).

It is possible that both “free choice” in the domain of relationships and “not having to choose” in the domain of decision making operate through similar mechanisms, such that they both allow individuals to maintain their ambivalence because they reduce the negative affect (i.e., uncertainty, anxiety) or acute feelings of tension and conflict associated with contradiction. We return to this point in the future research directions section.

4. Positive versus negative new information and events. The effects of ambivalence on engagement also appear to depend on the valence of new information collected about the other person in an ambivalent relationship, or the valence of an event that is being discussed with an ambivalent friend. In research on ambivalence-response-amplification (Gergen and Jones, 1963; Katz and Glass, 1979), whether individuals develop a decidedly negative engaging or positive engaging response to a minority outgroup about which one feels ambivalent depends on the nature of new data collected about that minority outgroup. Positive new information gathered about a minority member, for example, will lead to strong positive assessments whereas new negative information will lead to strong negative assessments. Consequently, at least within the context of attitudes about minority outgroups, positive information leads to “moving towards” responses whereas negative information leads to “moving against” or possibly “moving away.”

By contrast, in research on ambivalent relationships there is evidence that whether people engage or disengage when discussing an event with an ambivalent friend depends on the valence of the event. The lowest levels of systolic blood pressure reactivity occurred among those interacting with ambivalent friends when discussing a positive event (e.g., promotion), and it was
suggested by the authors that this may have occurred because individuals disengaged from the
discussion (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2007).

**SUMMARY AND MOVING FORWARD**

Thus far, we have argued for the prevalence of ambivalence in organizations, as
evidenced by its many well-documented antecedents, and have argued that the outcomes of
ambivalence are best described along two distinct dimensions: inflexibility-flexibility and
disengagement-engagement, as well as one moderator of the engagement effects-concern for
others. We have further delineated the mechanisms that lead to positive versus negative
outcomes along these dimensions, as well as those moderators that are most likely to facilitate
positive outcomes from ambivalence. We summarize these mediators and mechanisms in Table
5. Specifically, given our focus on the dual nature of ambivalence, we organize this Table around
both the negative and positive outcomes of ambivalence and the various mediators and
mechanisms that explain these relationships.

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Insert Table 5 about here
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Taken together, we have contributed to the field of ambivalence by providing organizing
dimensions for the various outcomes of ambivalence, and in doing so synthesizing a vast amount
of research from both management and psychology. In addition, by articulating the mechanisms
and moderators influencing the relationships between ambivalence and the outcomes associated
with it, we open the door for the productive management of ambivalence, a topic rarely
addressed in organizational studies (see Pratt and Rosa, 2003 for a possible exception regarding
relational ambivalence).
To move research in this area even further, we discuss five broad insights from our review that offer promising directions for future ambivalence research in organizational contexts.

1. *We know about the key dimensions, but are only just beginning to know about the relationship between them.* We have offered two major dimensions underlying all outcomes and responses to ambivalence: an *inflexibility–flexibility dimension* and a *disengagement-engagement dimension*. One of the most fundamental differences in how people react to ambivalence is whether their cognitions, emotions, and behaviors become more stable and fixed or more fluid. A second fundamental difference in how people react to ambivalence is whether individuals move toward or away from the object of their ambivalence. We have further argued that a key difference in these dimensions is that research exploring inflexibility-flexibility focuses on the effects of ambivalence for decision making and resilience for a single entity, but does not tend to focus on the effects of ambivalence for relational or social outcomes, whereas research exploring the disengagement-engagement dimension does. Moreover, while there is some discussion of inflexibility-flexibility in research exploring disengagement-engagement in relationships, research in this area has largely been about social and relational outcomes. Indeed, research has tended to explore one dimension or the other. As such, our understanding of how they might inter-relate is only just beginning. To begin to better explore how the dimensions inter-relate, we mapped the outcomes of ambivalence on the same dimensional space (Figure 1).

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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This mapping reveals some important insights regarding the effects of ambivalence. One key insight is that foundational research on the engagement and disengagement responses to
ambivalence tend towards the “inflexible-engaged” and “inflexible-disengaged” cells, with some research squarely falling on the y-axis representing engaged responses or disengaged responses that can be somewhat flexible or inflexible. Research on the inflexibility and flexibility responses to ambivalence tend to predominately fall on the x-axis, reflecting that these outcomes lead people to neither engage nor disengage from others. More recent scholarship tends toward the “flexible-engaged” cell, and has been conducted largely by management rather than psychology scholars. Very limited work, however, appears in the “flexible-but-disengaged” cell. That said, there does appear to be some support that when ambivalence is felt in the context of longer term relationships that are perceived as elective or voluntary, such as friendships, it may elicit flexible-disengaged responses. Specifically, feeling ambivalent about a friend can lead people to flexibly-disengage by maintaining the ambivalent friendship and frequent contact, but doing so in a more distant and less intimate way: such as distancing one’s self physically and emotionally but not exiting the friendship entirely (Bushman and Holt-Lunstad, 2009). This finding suggests to us that when ambivalent relationships are perceived as freely chosen, individuals may be able to endure their ambivalent feelings. Such emotional regulation may, in turn, allow ambivalent individuals to respond relatively more flexibly. More research, however, should explore this “off-diagonal” response.

The conditions under which disengaged-but-flexible responses might occur brings us to our second key insight. Specifically, reactions to observing ambivalence in social interaction partners (i.e., social engagement) and in reaction to experiencing ambivalence in relationships (i.e., relational engagement) can appear in each of the four quadrants, because of certain individual moderators and contextual conditions. As we have noted, to understand whether someone would flexibly or inflexibly move towards or away from the target of ambivalence, it
helps to know whether his or her intentions reflect a high or low degree of concern for the other. Beyond that, research suggests that social norms (e.g., competitive versus cooperative), relationship type (e.g., short-term or long-term), and task type (e.g., narrow or broad) may also influence the outcomes of ambivalence.

For example, research by Rothman (2011) suggests that inflexible-engaged responses to observing expressed emotional ambivalence in an interaction partner are most likely when concern for others is low (e.g., competitive social norms), and/or tasks are narrow (e.g., only distributive negotiation potential). By contrast, follow-up research by Rothman and Northcraft (2015) suggests that flexible-engaged responses to observing emotional ambivalence in an interaction partner are most likely when concern for others is high (e.g., cooperative social norms), and/or tasks are broad (e.g., integrative negotiation potential) (see also Rothman and Melwani, In Press). In contrast to these short-term interactions, inflexible-disengaged responses to feeling ambivalent appear likely when the ambivalence is felt in a longer term relationship. For instance, when individuals feel both strongly positive and strongly negative about a romantic partner, or supervisor, people are more likely to disengage by ending the romantic relationships (Thompson and Holmes, 1996), avoiding work responsibilities (Pratt & Doucet, 2000), and reducing commitment to the organization (Duffy, Ganster, and Pagon, 2002).

At a more general level, Pratt and Pradias (2011) suggest that another key moderator is whether the target of ambivalence is people or ideas. They suggest that when people are the focus of ambivalence (such as in relational ambivalence), hotter cognitions and a larger investment of self are likely to occur, prompting individuals to be more likely to engage in actions to at least partly resolve their ambivalence, leading to less flexible responses. In contrast, because ambivalence towards ideas is likely to lead to relatively colder cognitions and less
investment of the self, individuals may be more likely to hold onto their ambivalence, and by consequence, increase their behavioral flexibility. While such work is illuminating, significantly more work needs to be done to understand those conditions that predict the likelihood that a response to ambivalence would be more likely to occur on one quadrant or the other.

2. *We have a fundamental grasp of the positive and negative outcomes of ambivalence, but such understanding is likely still too simplistic.* Similar to our arguments about the dimensions of ambivalence responses, we also believe that we need to push forward our understanding of positive and negative outcomes of ambivalence in two primary ways. First, just as we need to know more about the conditions under which certain types of responses to ambivalence are likely to occur, we also need a more fine-grained understanding of when these specific response are “positive” or “negative” – or perhaps better said -- when are they more likely to lead to beneficial and functional outcomes rather than its deleterious ones. Looking broadly at the theories that predict negative versus positive outcomes, we think affect is likely to play a critical role. For example, psychologists often assume that as a result of having ambivalent attitudes or cognitions, negative affect occurs which, in turn, often leads to dysfunctional outcomes as people become highly motivated to rid themselves of their ambivalence or the negative affect it creates. Management theorists, by contrast, have tended to assume that ambivalent emotions – not simply negative ones – tend to accompany ambivalent cognitions. Moreover, it is the experience of multiple and conflicting emotions that cues individuals to take a broader look at the world (i.e., more flexible cognitions) and respond in a more adaptive fashion (Rothman & Melwani, in press).

While we continue to believe that the experience of both positive and negative affect is critical to unlocking the positive potential of ambivalence, we also believe researchers have only
begun to scratch the surface of understanding what the nature of the positive and negative affect might be, or when even the conditions under which single affective responses to cognitive ambivalence may lead to a beneficial and functional outcomes. To illustrate with negative affect, such affect has been operationalized in many different ways in the existing research, including as uncertainty-related negative emotions, regret, negative physiological arousal, and guilt. We suspect that the positive affect associated with ambivalence may be similarly varied (e.g., excitement, curiosity, hope, surprise). Considering what we know about the different effects of discrete negative emotions (e.g., Lerner and Keltner, 2000) and mixed emotions (e.g., Rees et al., 2013) on cognition and behavior, future research should attempt to clarify which types of positive and negative patterns of emotions are thought to mediate certain types of responses, and under what conditions. Research should also explore when ambivalence leads to more singular emotional responses. As Brickman (1987) notes, the positive or negative “face” of ambivalence may be experienced in a given ambivalent relationship at different times. We believe that the nature of this positive or negative face may be critical. For example, the experience of guilt from an ambivalent relationship may lead to positive results if it facilitates perspective taking (Melwani and Rothman, working paper).

Second, and more broadly, we need to be cautious about always equating flexibility with positive responses and rigidity with negative ones. As organizational researchers we know that what is “positive” and what is “negative” is often situation specific (e.g., Pratt and Pradies, 2011). To illustrate, some have argued that temporary paralysis following ambivalence – a form of behavioral inflexibility (e.g., Emmons and King, 1988) – may serve as a beneficial “pre-response” to other actions (Pratt and Doucet, 2000): that is, temporary paralysis can allow individuals an opportunity to reflect on what action they should take next before actually
engaging in it (Pratt and Pradies, 2013; Rothman and Wiesenfeld, 2007). In this case temporary paralysis is a positive, helpful reaction, perhaps because it reflects mere delays in action, which are posited to be beneficial for strategic (and other) decisions. On the other hand, Weick’s (1998; 2001) discussion of wisdom as the interplay between knowing and doubting – a form of ambivalence leading to extremely flexible responses – suggests that wisdom can erode a decision-maker’s confidence, thus hindering action (Ashforth, et al., 2014, Pratt and Pradies, 2011). This may be especially problematic if fast and deliberate action is needed, meaning that this type of flexible response may actually be a negative outcome of ambivalence.

3. We have made great strides in organizing the various outcomes of/ responses to ambivalence, but we still have a relatively underdeveloped role of the organizations role in predicting these outcomes/responses. Building on our previous two points above, as managerial ambivalence scholars, we believe that in order to unpack the question of how the dimensions of ambivalence inter-relate, and when and why ambivalence leads to positive versus negative outcomes, a major need is for research that pays more explicit attention to the theoretical and empirical role of the organizational context. Psychological research has offered a number of moderators such as whether the positivity and negativity are simultaneously activated (Newby-Clark, McGregor, and Zanna, 2002), individual differences (Fredrickson et al., 2003; Thompson & Zanna, 1995; Newby-Clark et al., 2002; Nowlis, Kahn, & Dhar, 2002), and demographic factors such as gender and age (see Carstensen et al., 2000; Ong & Bergeman, 2004; Ong et al., 2006; Uchino et al., 2001; Uchino, et al., 2012) that influence how unpleasant ambivalence feels, and thus shape many of the negative outcomes that have been reviewed above. Similar to traditional cognitive consistency theories, it has been suggested that the discomfort of ambivalence may motivate individuals to want to resolve the conflict and tension by becoming
more inflexible.\textsuperscript{8} However, empirical research on organizational moderators and boundary conditions remains relatively scant, and much existing management work remains theoretical, and in general, efforts in this area remain unintegrated. Indeed, little of the existing work has focused on the organizational conditions under which ambivalent individuals may become more flexible due to the conflict and contradiction inherent in this state. Our review does make significant progress in this area. For example, we note two critical commonalities across our review. “Safe” environments and contexts, as well as those that allow for the co-presence of multiple perspectives (e.g., boundary spanning roles and integrative decision contexts), are most likely to lead to flexible and engaging outcomes. That said, some puzzles remain to be disentangled. Take, for example, the illustrative example of a dialectical culture.

Dialecticism is thinking about a thing and its opposite without necessarily feeling that they are contradictory (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, and Norenzayan, 2001). On the one hand, dialecticism has been theorized to increase resilient responses to ambivalence. Positive and negative emotions are considered less conflicting and more compatible (Bagozzi, Wong, and Yi, 1999; Schimmack, Oishi, and Diener, 2002) in dialectical (i.e. Eastern) cultures than in less dialectical (i.e., Western) cultures. Individuals from dialectical cultures also tend to report more mixed emotions and to report them in response to both positive and negative events (Hui et al., 2009). In dialectical cultures, rather than forcing one to choose between sides or force a preference for one perspective over another, opposites can coexist and persist peacefully in a type of balanced harmony (Peng and Nisbett, 1999). Thus, during negative events, because

\textsuperscript{8} For instance, Sawicki and colleagues (2013) suggest that ambivalent attitudes will narrow individuals’ attention, increasing confirmatory information seeking (i.e., preferences for pro-attitudinal information) in order to resolve the tension and conflict of the ambivalent state, but only when people lack knowledge about the issue. Presumably, seeking new information that is consistent with one’s attitudes can be used to resolve the tension of the ambivalent state. However, when people are more knowledgeable about the issue, this preference for confirmatory information disappears, presumably because the familiar information is perceived to be relatively ineffective at reducing ambivalence.
individuals may not feel forced to resolve their ambivalence, positive can be added to the negative to create ambivalence, thus allowing individuals to “take the good with the bad” (Larsen et al., 2003). These results imply that in dialectical cultures, the detrimental effects of ambivalence for well-being may be attenuated, the positive effects on resilience may be increased, or perhaps both effects may occur simultaneously.

However, there is also reason to believe that dialecticism could decrease cognitively flexible responses to experiencing emotional ambivalence. Fong (2006) demonstrates that the perception of emotional ambivalence as unusual (i.e., “usually, people feel either happy or sad; they don’t feel both simultaneously”) is a critical moderator of the effect of ambivalence on creativity. Indeed, only participants in her experiment who believed that the experience of emotional ambivalence was unusual (and who were experiencing emotional ambivalence) demonstrated increased creativity scores. Emotionally ambivalent participants who believed that emotional ambivalence was common actually showed decreased creativity scores in comparison to the neutral participants. These findings suggest that individuals are using the experience of emotional ambivalence as a signal that they are in an unusual environment and responding to that signal with an increased attention to associations, thus resulting in increased creativity. These results also suggest, however, that individuals experiencing ambivalence in dialectical cultures, when positive and negative emotions are considered less unusual, may be less likely to reap the cognitive flexibility benefits of this emotional state.

Thus, when looked at together, these findings from different streams of ambivalence scholarship present an interesting conundrum that warrants future exploration. They suggest dialectical cultures may enhance the effect of ambivalence on emotional flexibility and
resilience, but they also suggest it may hinder cognitive flexibility, at least through the affect-as-information mechanism. Future research is needed to unpack these differences.

4. We know a lot about ambivalence from different disciplines and at different levels of analysis, but we still need a more integrative understanding. We believe it is critical for research on ambivalence in organizations to integrate the insights from disparate literatures and disciplines. As such, one focus of our review was on pulling together the currently fragmented research from across disciplines (e.g., psychology, organizational behavior, strategy and organizational theory), across levels of analysis (e.g., individual, interpersonal, group/organization), and at different ambivalence literatures (e.g., attitudinal, emotional, and relational), and in doing so, better revealing the unique role of the social and organizational context in these dynamics.

We believe that many of our major insights came from looking at research across the psychological and managerial divide, as well as the micro-macro-dive. Thus, we believe that future research should take a more interdisciplinary, cross-level approach. One example in which cross-pollination of psychological and managerial research would be fruitful is research on the effects of ambivalence on adaptability. Many of the articles examining the link between ambivalence and psychological resilience, on the one hand, and collective adaptability on the other, examine difficult and threatening contexts such as when CEOs are coping with significant events (e.g., Plambeck and Weber, 2009), individuals are working in especially high-hazard settings (e.g., Weick, 1996), or high-reliability organizations (e.g., HROs, Roberts, 1990), individuals are navigating a new cultural milieu (e.g., Molinsky, 2013), leaders are dealing with change (Rothman and Melwani, in press), or individuals are coping with stressful life events or life circumstances (e.g., Ong et al., 2006). Each of these situations are characterized by complex,
dynamic, and otherwise uncertain conditions, and it is in these contexts that negative reactions
such as anxiety, uncertainty, and doubt are natural responses. However, it is also in these
contexts that the openness and responsiveness (by individuals, dyads, groups, and collectives) at
the core of adaptive action are especially critical (Dane, 2010), and thus where ambivalence –
adding positive thoughts and emotions to the negative – may be particularly beneficial. Thus, it
is precisely in contexts such as these that it would be particularly generative and reciprocally
useful for the psychological research on the benefits of ambivalence for individual-level
resilience and the managerial research on collective-level adaptability that can stem from
ambivalence to speak to one another more explicitly. Indeed, both organizations and individuals
appear to use ambivalence to increase adaptation and adaptability, and these literatures would be
well served by drawing on one another even more.

We also believe it is critical for more cross-pollination of research across levels of
analysis. A related example for future research to examine is how ambivalence dynamics vary
within and across levels of analysis in organizational contexts. To illustrate, one common theme
in extant work is that under certain conditions ambivalence can increase individual,
interpersonal, and group flexibility because it makes people more receptive and open to
alternative perspectives (Pratt and Pradies, 2011; Rothman and Melwani, in press). At the
individual level, the experience of ambivalence can lead to greater cognitive flexibility (e.g.,
Fong, 2006). Similarly, at the interpersonal level, expressing ambivalence in a negotiation can
increase flexible integrative bargaining in others (e.g., Rothman and Northcraft, 2015) as well as
lead to more engaged followers, perhaps because it increases perceptions of a leader’s flexibility
(Rothman and Melwani, in press). At the group and organizational level, ambivalence is thought
to increase flexibility to the extent that it increases search for information and input from others,
as well as discussion of that input (Plambeck and Weber, 2009; Rothman and Wiesenfeld, 2007),
the reduction of group conformity, and increased cognitive complexity of group decision making
(Rothman and Wiesenfeld, 2007), as well as enhance organizational adaptability (Weick, 1998,
2004), and mindful organizing (Vogus et al., 2014). These effects cross levels of analysis in that
these collective-level effects are theorized to occur in part because of the cognitive flexibility
that ambivalent individuals bring to their groups and collectives, and in part because of the
flexibility that can be realized when ambivalence is expressed in social interactions. However,
very little work has actually examined these cross-level effects as well as to unpack the
reciprocal (whether symmetrical or asymmetrical) and dynamic nature of these effects over time.
This provides yet another fruitful path for inquiry into the potentially positive results of
ambivalence in and around organizations.

5. There is general consensus about how to define ambivalence, but less awareness about
how ambivalence is measured across disciplines. While positivity and negativity have often been
conceptualized as opposite ends of a bipolar continuum and are measured that way with likert-
type scales, scholars have developed an alternative perspective that contends that positivity and
negativity represent separable processes and are better conceptualized in terms of a bivariate
space as opposed to a bipolar continuum, and should thus be measured that way (see Evaluative
Space Model; Cacioppo and Berntson, 1994; Cacioppo, Gardner and Berntson, 1997, 1999).
Indeed, doing so, resolves a primary issue with likert-type scales which is that it is impossible to
differentiate indifference from ambivalence using these methods. Indeed, it is unclear if
individuals intend their midpoint responses to mean “neither positive nor negative” or to mean
“equally positive and negative”. Scott (1966) and Kaplan (1972) seminal work have provided a
framework and standardized procedure to assess positive and negative ratings towards an attitude
object and has become the most common approach to studying ambivalent attitudes and emotions since (e.g., Larsen et al., 2001).

CONCLUSION

To close, by looking across disciplines (e.g., psychology, organizational behavior, strategy and organizational theory), across levels of analysis (e.g., individual, interpersonal, group/organization), and at different ambivalence literatures (e.g., attitudinal, emotional, and relational) our review suggests that ambivalence holds considerable promise. Indeed, while ambivalence in psychology has historically emphasized ambivalence as a source of physiological and psychological distress – something that has to be avoided or that necessitates perseverance to get through – recent research, especially in the area of management, has begun to build on the notion that holding onto ambivalence can be beneficial for individuals, groups, and organizations. Central to the very notion of the concept of ambivalence, however, is that it entails two sides, and thus can lead to either negative or positive outcomes. We have reviewed and integrated the literature in a way that not only shows the dual nature of the concept (e.g., within our two dimensions of (in)flexibility and (dis)engagement), but also discusses the mechanisms that lead to positive versus negative outcomes as well as the moderators that influence which outcome is more likely to arise. Finally, while we believe that this review has made significant strides in integrating insights from across different literatures and different levels of analysis, we also argue that we are still seeing the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Having sketched out roughly a foundation -- in the form of the core dimensions of ambivalence, and the conditions under which “positive” (e.g., flexible and engaging) outcomes in organizations are more likely to occur than negative -- we believe that there is incredible promise in what can be built from here.

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References


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### Table 1: Total counts of articles referencing ambivalence, mixed emotions, or mixed feelings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Total number of articles</th>
<th>Total number of articles in management journals</th>
<th>Total number of articles in psychology journals</th>
<th>Total number of articles in other journals (sociology, marketing, business ethics)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940-1959</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1979</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1999</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-present</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals:</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The category of other journals included a small subset of A-level journals from relevant related fields for comparison purposes only and were not meant to comprise an exhaustive list: Sociology: American Sociological Review, American Journal of Sociology, and The Sociological Review; Marketing: Journal of Consumer Research; Business ethics: Journal of Business Ethics.

The search was conducted through ProQuest and Web of Science databases on September 19, 2014. The search was restricted to specified terms appearing in an article title (ProQuest and Web of Science) or abstract (ProQuest). The search terms included ambivalence*, mixed emotion*, and mixed feelings. The search was limited to articles related to organizational behavior/management, social psychology, sociology, marketing, and business ethics.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence</td>
<td>Ashforth, Rogers, Pratt and Pradies, 2014</td>
<td>Simultaneously oppositional positive and negative orientations toward an object. Ambivalence includes cognition (“I think about X”) and /or emotion (“I feel about X”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait Ambivalence</td>
<td>Sincoff, 1990</td>
<td>Overlapping approach-avoidance tendencies, manifested behaviorally, cognitively, or affectively, and directed toward a given person or experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude Ambivalence</td>
<td>Cacioppo, Gardner, and Berntson, 1997; Glicke and Fiske, 1996; Priester and Petty 1996; Thompson, Zanna and Griffin, 1995; Van Harreveld et al., 2015</td>
<td>Simultaneous positive and negative attitudes about a target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Emotions</td>
<td>Larsen, McGraw and Cacioppo, 2001; Larsen and McGraw, 2014</td>
<td>The co-occurrence of positive and negative affects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Ambivalence</td>
<td>Fong, 2006; Pratt and Doucet, 2000; Pratt and Rosa, 2003; Rothman, Rees, Lehavy and Sanchez-Burks, 2013</td>
<td>The simultaneous experience of positive and negative emotions about the same target (such as a person, situation, object, symbol or idea).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Ambivalence</td>
<td>Uchino, Holt-Lunstad, Uno and Flinders, 2001</td>
<td>Network members who are a source of both positivity and negativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressed Ambivalence</td>
<td>Fourie, 2003; Givens, 1978; Rothman, 2011; Rothman and Northcraft, 2015; Sincoff, 1990, 1992; Schachner, Schaver and Mikulincer, 2005</td>
<td>Expression of tension and conflict. Tense and conflicted facial expressions, body posture, behavior, tone of voice and/or movement is shown by conflicted approach and avoid behaviors such as movement in one direction and then another direction in both the face and the body. On the face, by moving between inner brow raising and lowering and shifting gaze. In the body, by fidgeting hands, tilting head back and forth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence</td>
<td>Ashforth et al., 2014</td>
<td>Simultaneous oppositional positive and negative orientations toward an object. Ambivalence includes cognition (“I think about X”) and/or emotion (“I feel about X”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive dissonance</td>
<td>Kantola et al., 1984</td>
<td>“When a person has two beliefs or items of knowledge that are not consistent with each other” (Kantola et al., 1984, p. 417). There is conceptual overlap between dissonance and ambivalence (Baek, 2010), but this definition suggests that dissonance arises when there is inconsistency between thoughts (e.g., I want to hire candidate A and I want to not hire candidate A). Additionally, cognitive dissonance is exclusively cognitive, whereas ambivalence can be cognitive and/or affective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baek 2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional dissonance</td>
<td>Diestel and Schmidt, 2011</td>
<td>“The discrepancy between emotions felt and those required by the job role is commonly referred to as emotional dissonance” (Diestel and Schmidt, 2011, p. 643). As with the distinction above regarding cognitive dissonance, ambivalence requires opposition and not simply discrepancy. Thus, a role may require one to smile when one does not feel like it (emotional dissonance), but this is different than simultaneously feeling happy and not happy (ambivalence). Moreover, the inconsistency in emotional dissonance in between feeling and behavior that one’s role demands. Ambivalence is not necessarily emotional and does not include a behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypocrisy</td>
<td>Fassin and Buelens, 2011</td>
<td>“Clear inconsistency between word and deed” (Fassin and Buelens, 2011, p. 587). Hypocrisy is a contradiction between a statement and action, which is generally perceived and labeled by an observer. Ambivalence involves cognition and/or emotion rather than behavior, although ambivalence may cause an actor to behave in ways that could be perceived by others as hypocritical. Thus, hypocrisy can be an outcome of ambivalence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>Carson et al., 2006</td>
<td>“The degree of uncertainty inherent in perceptions of the environmental state” (Carson et al., 2006, p. 1059). Ambiguity is concerned with uncertainty or a lack of clarity, whereas ambivalence is the experience of two clear but opposing thoughts and/or feelings toward an object.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equivocality</td>
<td>Daft and Macintosh, 1981</td>
<td>“The multiplicity of meaning conveyed by information about organizational activities” (Daft and Macintosh, 1981, p. 211). Equivocality captures the potential for multiple meanings and interpretations of a message. If these meanings are oppositional, there is potential for the equivocality to trigger ambivalence.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poignancy</td>
<td>Ersner-Hershfield, Mikels, Sullivan, Carstensen, 2008</td>
<td>A mixture of happiness and sadness that occurs when one faces meaningful endings that signify the passage of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Complexity Trait</td>
<td>Kang and Shaver, 2004</td>
<td>A tendency to have well- differentiated, broad emotional experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Synchrony Trait</td>
<td>Rafaeli, Rogers, and Revelle, 2007</td>
<td>The tendency to experience mixed emotions regularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradoxical Frames</td>
<td>Miron-Spektor, Gino and Argote, 2011</td>
<td>Mental templates that individuals use to embrace seemingly contradictory statements or dimensions of a task or situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative Complexity</td>
<td>Suedfeld, Tetlock, and Streufert, 1992</td>
<td>The capacity and willingness to acknowledge the legitimacy of competing perspectives on the same issue (differentiation) and to forge conceptual links among these perspectives (integration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Mediators / Mechanisms</td>
<td>Authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Response amplification (e.g., more extreme responses to different ethnic groups)</td>
<td>2. Reduced ability to decide (i.e., indecision, vacillation, rumination)</td>
<td>Emmons &amp; King, 1988; Nohlen, van Harreveld, van der Pligt, &amp; Rotteveel, under review; Sincoff, 1990; Van Harreveld &amp; Van der Pligt et al., 2009; Weick, 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reduced ability to decide (i.e., indecision, vacillation, rumination)</td>
<td>1. Uncertainty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Confirmation bias</td>
<td>1. Motivation to reduce negative affect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Compensatory order perceptions (e.g., false perceptions of order, conspiracy beliefs)</td>
<td>1. Motivation to reduce uncertainty-related negative affect (i.e., anxiety, irritation, doubt)</td>
<td>Van Harreveld, Rutjens, Schneider, Nohlen, &amp; Keskinis, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Flexibility</td>
<td>1. Affect as information</td>
<td>Fong 2006; Meyerson, 2001; Plambeck &amp; Weber, 2009; Pratt &amp; Barnett, 1997; Rees, Rothman, Lehavy &amp; Sanchez Burks, 2013; Rothman &amp; Melwani, In Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Cognitive breadth and scope of attention (e.g., creativity, openness to alternative perspectives)</td>
<td>2. Unlearning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Motivation to engage in balanced processing of multiple perspectives (e.g., advice taking)</td>
<td>3. Perspective Taking</td>
<td>Rees, Rothman, Lehavy &amp; Sanchez Burks, 2013; Rothman &amp; Melwani, In Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Inflexibility</td>
<td>1. Experienced dilemma (e.g., costs and benefits)</td>
<td>Lüscher &amp; Lewis, 2008; Sincoff, 1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Behavioral paralysis</td>
<td>2. Uncertainty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Resistance to change (e.g., neglect, avoidance)</td>
<td>1. Motivation to reduce negative affect</td>
<td>Vince &amp; Broussine, 1996; Piderit, 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Defensive coping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Behavioral Flexibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Individual openness to change (e.g., reduced escalation of commitment)</th>
<th>1. Tentative and reversible commitments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Cognitive flexibility</td>
<td>2. Broader organizational participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Unlearning</td>
<td>4. Unlearning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Interpersonal adaptability (e.g., cross-cultural adaptability)</th>
<th>1. Attentiveness to own and others’ feelings and thoughts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Motivation to question and reconsider interpersonal behavior</td>
<td><a href="#">Kang &amp; Shaver, 2004; Molinsky, 2013</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Collective adaptability</th>
<th>1. Wisdom (i.e., balance between knowing and doubting)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Emotional and Physical Inflexibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Psychopathology (e.g., depression, guilt, worthlessness)</th>
<th>1. Ambivalence is highly internalized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Ambivalence is unresolved</td>
<td><a href="#">Freud, 1917; Sincoff, 1990;</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Reduced psychological health (e.g., life satisfaction, neuroticism, depression)</th>
<th>1. Inhibition of action towards goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Greater rumination about goals</td>
<td>3. Desire for a positive connection relative to ambivalent connections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Adverse physical health and well-being (e.g., cellular aging; cardiovascular reactions; inflammation)</th>
<th>1. Increased vigilance, sense of uncontrollability, or interpersonal stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Negative affect (e.g., ambivalent friends can be upsetting)</td>
<td>3. Less high quality emotional support from ambivalent relationship partners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Emotional and Physical Flexibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Psychological resilience (e.g., grief recovery; lower helplessness; decreased depression)</th>
<th>1. Meaning making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Daily positive emotions</td>
<td>3. Problem-focused coping; positive reappraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="#">Adler &amp; Hershfield, 2012; Bonnano and Keltner, 1997; Coifman, Bonnano and Rafaeli, 2007; Folkman &amp; Moscowitz, 2000; Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson et al., 2003; Larsen, Hemenover, Norris, and Cacioppo, 2003; Ong, Bergemen, Bisconti and Wallace, 2006</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Physical resilience (e.g., long-term physical symptoms across sensory, cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, and genitourinary systems)</th>
<th>1. Meaning making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Positive emotions</td>
<td>3. Positive reappraisal of negative situation and down-regulation of negative emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="#">Davis, Zautra, and Smith, 2004; Hershfield, Scheibe, Sims, &amp; Carstensen, 2013; Tugade and Fredrickson 2004; Tugade et al., 2004; Zautra et al., 2002; Zautra et al., 2000</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Mediators / Mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Disengagement from Others (When Feel Ambivalent)</td>
<td>1. Moving away, distancing (e.g., avoidance of customers; lower commitment to organization)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Mixed and conflicted thoughts and feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Inconsistency, confusion, and inability to cope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Generalized confusion and uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Emotional dissonance resulting from emotional labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Social undermining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Disengagement from Others (When Observe Expressed Ambivalence in Others)</td>
<td>1. Moving away, distancing from ambivalent other (e.g., negative judgments of experts as lower quality; negotiation partners as less trustworthy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Perceived indecisiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Perceived as unpredictable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Engagement with Others (When Feel Ambivalent)</td>
<td>1. Moving against relationship partners (e.g., negative attitudes toward minority groups; disruptive or unethical behavior in organizations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Discomfort and motivation to resolve the internal conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Emotional dissonance resulting from emotional labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Intense negative attachment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Accepting ambivalence in relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Binding of positive and negative elements by making a free choice to accept both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Unlearning of previous habits and ideas and relearning of new ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Higher trust and empathy as well as greater reciprocity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Accentuate the negative aspect of the relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Engagement with Others (When Observe Expressed Ambivalence in Others)</td>
<td>1. Moving against partner (e.g., taking charge; taking material advantage of a negotiation partner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Perceived deliberativeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Perceived submissiveness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Moving toward partner (e.g., creation of higher joint gains in integrative negotiations; motivate greater group engagement)

| 1. Perceived submissiveness  
| 2. Perceived cognitive flexibility  
| 3. Doubt and uncertainty in group decision making processes  
| 4. Openness to other perspectives  
| 5. Flexibility in implementation plans |

Engagement and Disengagement: Vacillation

| 1. Vacillation (e.g., children seeking out and resisting contact with primary caregivers; Amway distributors moving toward and against organization) |
| 1. Perception of caregiver as inconsistent and thus uncertainty about maternal availability  
| 2. Contradictory thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that create “two minds”  
| 3. Splitting defense mechanism (e.g., separating positive and negative orientations) to create simplified responses |

| Gilbert, 2006; Plambeck & Weber, 2009; Rothman & Melwani, In Press; Rothman & Northcraft, 2015; Rothman & Wiesenfeld, 2007 |

| Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1982; Cassidy & Berlin, 1994; Pratt, 2000; Pratt & Doucet, 2000; Rowe, Cannella, Rankin, and Gorman, 2005 |
Figure 1: Integrating Flexibility and Engagement Dimensions

Engage with Others

- Response Amplification*
- Marital Discord & Dissatisfaction
- Perceiver Aggression & Dominance
- Perceiver Taking Charge

Commitment
Trust

Vacillation

Inflexible

Vacillation

Flexible

Disengaged from Others

- Relationship Dissolution
- Perceivers' Negative Judgments
- Reduced advice taking
- Reduced commitment to organization
- Increased Blood Pressure
- Quitting

- Physical and Emotional Distancing

Key:
**Bold** signifies engaging – disengaging reactions to ambivalence in context of relationships or social interactions

*Italicics* signifies flexible – inflexible reactions to ambivalence among individuals

*These outcome are high engage with others and low flexibility. They are also more likely to be realized when concern for self is high

**These outcomes are high engage others and high flexibility. They also are more likely to be realized when concern for other is high