Children's influence and processes of interpersonal influence in family systems

Jan De Mol

Promotor: Prof. Dr. Ann Buysse

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CHAPTER 1

General Introduction

In this introductory chapter the theoretical framework of the present dissertation is discussed. Working hypotheses and research questions are formulated. In addition, an overview of the different chapters is presented.

This dissertation is about interpersonal influence in parent-child and family relations and can be roughly subdivided into two parts. The first part reports on research about children's influence on their parents. More specifically, research was conducted on meaning construction about children's influence, starting from the theory of bidirectionality in parent-child relations (Kuczynski, 2003). The second part reports on research conducted about the factors of family functioning that construct processes of influence in family relations. For this purpose the Social Relations Model (Kenny & La Voie, 1984) was used as the main theoretical framework. In this second part the scope is broadened from parent-child to all family relations.

CHILDREN'S INFLUENCE ON THEIR PARENTS

Bidirectional models have become more common in recent research into parent-child relationships (Parke, 2002). Bidirectionality stresses the co-occurrence of both directions of influence − from parent to child and from child to parent − in a complex reciprocal system (Kuczynski, 2003). Two general approaches on bidirectional influence in parent-child relationships can be distinguished (Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997): the behavioural perspective (Patterson & Fisher, 2002), which considers bidirectionality as reciprocal exchanges of behaviours producing linear change, and the cognitive dialectical perspective, which considers bidirectionality as a process of meaning construction between humans producing transformational change (Valsiner, Branco, & Dantas, 1997). In this dissertation we adopt a cognitive dialectical perspective on bidirectionality.

The notion of human agency is central to this cognitive dialectical perspective on bidirectionality. Agency is a multifaceted construct (Bandura, 2001), referring to the human capacity for initiating purposeful behaviour to influence the other and the ability to

interpret these relational experiences and to accommodate future behaviour according to these constructs of meaning. Moreover, human agency reflects people's motive for autonomy. Kuczynski (2003) defines agency as "considering individuals as actors with the ability to make sense of the environment, initiate change, and make choices" (p. 9). In this dissertation we approach parents and children as agentic beings. We focus in particular on the ability of the agents to make sense of their relational environment or their ability to meaning construction in the parent-child relationship.

Recent proposals on bidirectionality in parent-child relationships emphasize that children and parents are equally agentic (Kuczynski, Harach, & Bernardini, 1999). Both parents and children contribute as equal partners to the development and construction of their relationship. Consequently a bidirectional framework on parent-child relations must add a child-to-parent direction of influence to the widely accepted parent-to-child influence (Maccoby, 2003). Although research on the neglected children's side in the bidirectional process has received attention in recent years (e.g., Crouter & Booth, 2003), little research has focused on the meaning constructions of parents and children concerning children's influence. Especially the children's perspective is absent in the research literature. Considering meaning construction as essential to relational development − the focal point and basic assumption of this dissertation − implies focusing on the significance of meanings constructed about children's influence. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 address this issue.

Chapter 2 describes a phenomenological study in which parents and children from the same family were interviewed about children's influence on their parents. The *research question (1)* was: what meanings do children and parents construct regarding the children's influence on their parents? Consistent with our dialectical

approach, similarities and differences between the children's and parents' meanings are studied. A working hypothesis was that by inviting the relationship agents to think about the unusual topic of children's influence, other perspectives on interpersonal influence would emerge. In the literature on interpersonal influence a distinction is made between intentional and unintentional influence (Huston, 2002), or between agentic and non-agentic processes (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006). Consequently *the hypothesis was that the relationship actors would make use of this theoretical distinction to construct meanings about children's influence in the bidirectional relationship (Hypothesis 1)*.

Another basic assumption of bidirectionality concerns the reciprocal influences between the various levels of social complexity, i.e., individual, interaction, relationship, group and socio-cultural structure (Hinde, 1997). That is, meaning construction goes beyond the borders of the relationship and is affected by all levels of social life including the socio-cultural contexts. To validate and simultaneously extend the findings from the phenomenological study (Chapter 2), a broader social constructionist research approach was chosen using Q methodology. This Q-methodological study is described in Chapter 3. The *research question (2)* was: what understandings (meanings and beliefs) exist in Belgian-Flemish culture concerning children's influence on their parents? Consonant with a dialectical perspective, similarities and differences between the children's and adults' understandings are analyzed.

The phenomenological study and Q study form a whole (first part of this dissertation) and concern the research on meaning construction about children's influence. In the phenomenological study the focus is on meaning construction in the parent-child relationship with special attention on processes of agentic and non-

agentic influence. The Q study focuses on understandings and contents of children's influence. Because the participants (children, parents, and non-parents) in both studies taught us the significance of the difference between intentional and unintentional processes of influence in family systems, we wanted to investigate whether or not both influence-modes are constructed by the same or different factors of family functioning. This research constitutes the second part of the dissertation.

INFLUENCE IN FAMILY SYSTEMS AND THE SOCIAL RELATIONS MODEL

The notion 'sense of control' reflects people's beliefs about their ability to influence outcomes (Bandura, 1997). Therefore sense of control is strongly related to interpersonal influence, the process by which relationship partners affect and change each other's thoughts, behaviour and emotions (Huston, 2002). Interpersonal influence can be intentional or unintentional (Huston, 2002). Intentional influence refers to the process by which a relationship partner, to obtain particular effects, intentionally generates action to change the other partner's thoughts, behaviour or emotions. In contrast, unintentional influence is the process by which relationship partners affect one another without particular goal-directed intentions. In the literature the notion sense of control is typically understood as intentional influence, insofar as it reflects people's beliefs about their ability to persuade or convince one another, or their ability to act strategically in order to obtain desired goals. The purpose of our research was to make a distinction between sense of intentional influence and sense of unintentional influence.

This research, described in Chapter 4 (Part 1), elaborates on Cook's study about sense of control in family systems using the Social

Relations Model (SRM; Cook, 1993). A distinctive feature of a family system is interdependence. Interdependence means that people influence each other outcomes (Kelley, 1979). Consequently a family member's sense of control in a specific relationship is dependent on various factors, i.e., the personality of the family member who is influencing (actor factor, i.e., the sense of influence the actor has in all his/her family relations), the personality of the family member who is being influenced (partner factor, i.e., the sense of influence the partner elicits in all his/her family relations), the specific relationship between both family members (relationship factor, i.e., the specific adjustment the actor makes towards the partner), and the culture of the family (family factor). The family version of SRM (Kashy & Kenny, 1990) provides means of testing the relative significance of these various factors.

In Cook's study (Cook, 1993) sense of control was investigated as intentional influence. In our study several scales were developed in which the factors intentionality and valence of outcome (positive or negative) were systematically manipulated, referring to constructs of both sense of intentional influence (with positive or negative effect) and sense of unintentional influence (with positive and negative effect). The main *research question (3)* was: are family members' sense of intentional influence and sense of unintentional influence constructed by the same or by different SRM factors? Because so far no empirical research was conducted regarding this issue, the hypotheses we propose stems from systems theory and clinical practice (e.g., Dell, 1989; Watzlawick, Jackson, & Beavin, 1967). *The working hypothesis was that family members' sense of intentional influence will be more dependent on actor factors than on partner factors, whereas family members' sense of unintentional influence will be more dependent on partner factors than on actor*

factors (Hypothesis 2). We expected that investigating a sense of intentionality would trigger personality and motivational dimensions, resulting in more actor variance. On the other hand, the expectation was that a sense of unintentional influence is more dependent on characteristics of the partner, something the partner might elicit from the other family members independent of their intentional action towards the partner. In addition, it was expected that in both sense of intentional and unintentional influence relationship factors would be important. *The hypothesis was that asking family members to connect their (un-)intentionality with effects for another family member, would force the family members to evaluate the meanings of their effects for that other person (Hypothesis 3)*. This implies that the actor has to make a unique judgment (fit) towards the partner resulting in significant relationship variance.

In Part 2 of Chapter 4 a somewhat different research approach regarding processes of interpersonal influence in family systems is described. The *research question (4)* was whether or not family members have shared perspectives on interpersonal influence in family relations, and if so, which SRM factors construct this objectified influence in family systems. Although the focal point of this dissertation is meaning construction or sense of influence, which can be considered as a purely subjective or personal matter, the search for non-subjective measures of interpersonal influence is important (Cook, 2001). This research can inform us, with respect to interpersonal influence, if a family system is merely a context of difference or also a context of shared perspectives.

In Chapter 5 a SRM family assessment of a clinical family is described. The purpose of this single case research was twofold. First, a significant value of SRM is that it provides means to underpin empirically systemic hypotheses. SRM disentangles the various levels

of systemic functioning and gives information about the relative significance of these levels to family functioning. Consequently the family therapist is informed about possible perspectives that can guide psychotherapeutic interventions. The SRM family assessment of the clinical family exemplifies this approach. *A working hypothesis was that the clinical family members would especially deviate from the normative sample for relationship effects (Hypothesis 4)*. Actor and partner effects reflect personality characteristics. A general systemic assumption is that contexts create persons. Because relationships are the proximal contexts within a family, it was expected that especially relationship effects would deviate. Second, the distinction between sense of intentional and sense of unintentional influence is discussed as an interesting concept for systemic assessment. *A hypothesis was that family members would have less sense of unintentional influence, because the qualitative research described in the first part of this dissertation indicated that unintentional influence touches an existential dimension of relationships and, as a consequence, reflects connectedness between family members (Hypothesis 5)*. Another *hypothesis was that the scores for intentional influence would be more extreme, because the power dimension becomes more accentuated in problematic family relationships (Haley, 1980) (Hypothesis 6)*.

TO CONCLUDE

Chapter 6 presents an integrated overview of the main findings obtained from the research discussed in the two parts of this dissertation. Methodological considerations, limitations of our research, theoretical and clinical implications, and directions for future research are discussed.

This dissertation consists of several manuscripts, which are in press, under editorial review, or submitted for publication. Hence,

partial overlap between the several chapters occurs, although attempts were made to minimize this lumber.

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CHAPTER 2

The Phenomenology of Children's Influence on Parents[1]

Starting from the core systemic premise that humans influence each other, this paper focuses on child influences in the bidirectional parent-child relationship. Following a co-constructionist approach on bidirectionality, meaning constructions of children and their parents concerning child influences are explored. The authors used in-depth interviews separately with children and their parents. Phenomenological analysis shows similarities and differences in children's and parents' thinking. Both stress the difficulty and existential dimension of the subject and refer to this influence as mainly unintentional. Especially children disentangle their influence from power or control. Children focus on the responsiveness of their parents and derive their agency in the relationship from the effects they observe. Parents emphasize the overwhelming effects on their personal and relational development. The importance to make room for constructive child influences in family therapy is acknowledged.

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INTRODUCTION

Systemic psychotherapy starts from the premise that humans influence each other (Hedges, 2005). Interpersonal influence is the process by which relationship partners affect and change each others thoughts, behaviour and emotions (Huston, 2002). Moreover, the ability to influence each other is crucial to the functioning and development of a relationship (Cook, 2001). In this paper, we report on research on interpersonal influence in parent-child relations − more specifically, the influence of children on their parents. This research was performed in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium.

Recent research in the domain of parent-child relations commonly assumes a bidirectional perspective on interpersonal influence (Parke, 2002). Bidirectionality stresses the co-occurrence of both directions of influence − from parent to child and from child to parent − in a complex reciprocal system (Kuczynski, 2003). There is a large body of research on bidirectionality and reciprocity in parent-child relations (Pettit & Lollis, 1997) in several different domains, including developmental psychology (Crouter & Booth, 2003; Kuczynski, 2003), research on parent-infant communication (e.g., Trevarthen & Aitkin, 2001), and the sociology of childhood (Morrow, 2003). Recent proposals on bidirectionality in parent-child relationships emphasize the equal agency of parents and children (Kuczynski *et al.*, 1999). Agency is a multifaceted construct (Bandura, 2001), referring to the human capacity for initiating purposeful behaviour to influence the other, and the ability to interpret and construct meanings out of relational experiences. In this study, we focus on meaning construction in the parent-child relationship. We report on research into meaning constructions of the children's influence in the parent-child relationship: which meanings are

constructed by children and their parents concerning the children's influence on their parents.

A bidirectional framework for parent-child relations differs fundamentally from traditional views. Before bidirectionality, research on parent-child relations was dominated by a unidirectional approach. Historically, this unidirectional approach entails two main views (Maccoby, 2003). First, and most traditionally, there are the top-down 'parenting' formulations in which parents are seen as shaping their children. In this classical unidirectional approach, the parents are seen as the only active agents, and children are regarded as passive recipients of parental influence. The second unidirectional view is represented by the notion of 'child effects' (Bell, 1968) − that is, the influence children have on their parents. Unlike the parenting approach, child effects are usually studied in a non-agentic way (Russell & Russell, 1992). This means that, although the influence of children on their parents is recognized, it concerns effects that do not entail much active involvement on the part of the child (e.g., the child's age, gender, temperament).

Despite this constrained perspective on children's influence in parent-child relationships, the study of child effects set the stage for the development of bidirectional models in which the influence of both parents and children is recognized. A bidirectional framework for parent-child relations adds a child-to-parent direction of influence to the widely accepted parent-to-child influence (Kuczynski & Navara, 2006). In addition to the comprehensive research on parenting, research on children's influence has also received much attention in recent years (Crouter & Booth, 2003; Cummings & Schermerhorn, 2003). This research shows how children can influence their parents' monitoring and educational efforts (Kerr & Stattin, 2003), their own socialization through influencing parental strategies (Grusec &

Goodnow, 1994), and many aspects of their parents' personalities (Ambert, 2001; Palkowitz *et al.*, 2003). In addition, recent approaches to bidirectionality emphasize that agency and bidirectional influence in parent-child relationships must be understood in the context of an intimate, long-term relationship (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006). This relational perspective implies that parents and children cannot be understood as discrete individuals. Instead, the relationship context − in which parents and children know each other intimately and have their influences intertwined in an interdependent long-term relationship with a past and a future − makes parents and children receptive as well as vulnerable to each other's influence and both facilitates and constrains each other's exercise of agency and power.

In sum, there is burgeoning evidence for reciprocal influences in the parent-child relation and for the importance of the children's influence in this bidirectional relationship context. However, little research has focused on the thinking and meaning constructions of children themselves regarding their influence on their parents. There is a shortage of research relating to children's reports about their own experiences (Hogan *et al.*, 1999). Research in this area has mainly been conducted using procedures in which parents are asked how they experience the influences of their children, and adult children are asked, retrospectively, about how they influenced their parents (Ambert, 2001; Dillon, 2002; Palkovitz *et al.*, 2003). Considering children as equal agents in the relationship with their parents implies the assumption that, as human beings with their own agentic features, children construct meanings and beliefs about their influence that differ from those of their parents. And vice versa: considering parents as equal agents in the bidirectional relationship with their children means that parents construct meanings about the influence their children have on them that differ from those of their children.

Moreover, little research has focused on similarities and differences in the thought processes between children and parents regarding children's influence. From this point of view, we have posed the research question: What meanings do children construct concerning their influence on their parents? At the same time, focusing on similarities and differences and extending former research, we have also posed the question: What beliefs (Sigel & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 2002) do parents construct in relation to the influences their children have on them?

These research questions are both clinically and theoretically important. Clinically, family therapists agree on the constructive nature of mutual influences in family systems and the contribution of child influences in these processes is highlighted (e.g., Rober, 1998). However, the question remains how child influences are constructed in family narratives within a culture that constructs influences in parent-child relationships as predominantly unidirectional, from parent to child (Kuczynski *et al*., 2003). Although knowing how children and parents understand child influences is important, we currently lack empirical research in this area. Theoretically, recent debates on bidirectionality in parent-child relations emphasize the difference between agentic and non-agentic influence (Kuczynski, 2003; Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006). Agentic influence is conceptualized as intentional and goal-directed behaviour, non-agentic influence refers to processes of automaticity and habit between people. Because historically only parents were considered as active agents and child influences were merely understood as non-agentic, recent research on bidirectionality starts from the premise that parents and children are equally agents and focuses on the agency of children. However, little research has focused on children's and parents' conceptualizations of child influences. The question remains whether or not the distinction

between agentic and non-agentic influence is useful and constructed by the relationship participants themselves.

In the present study, we have adopted a co-constructionist perspective (Valsiner *et al.*, 1997). A co-constructionist perspective promotes an interest in the thought processes of children and parents regarding their interactions and relationship. Children and parents are seen as 'thinking subjects', acting in a relationship where meanings are constructed regarding oneself and the other within the reciprocal processes of influence. These mutual meanings are seen as central to the development of the parent-child relationship (Hinde, 1997). Co-constructionism stresses both the uniqueness of a person and the intertwinement of a person and his/her culture (Valsiner, 1994). Humans and culture create one another in an ongoing dialectical process. That is, meaning construction occurs in a social-cultural discourse and co-occurs with individual and relational functioning and development. Individuals and relations are embedded in social and cultural contexts, while these contexts are created through individuals and relations. Here, the theory of co-constructionism and social constructionism overlap. A constructionist perspective regarding people and relationships emphasizes the central role of meaning constructions (beliefs, understandings, cognitions) for both human and relational development (Bugental & Johnston, 2000). Therefore, in this study, we first focus on the meaning constructions of children and parents separately; and second, we compare these children's and parents' meanings about the children's influence on their parents from a dialectical perspective.

The age group of the participating children in this study was early adolescence (11 to 15 years). We chose this target group for the following reasons. On the one hand, we assumed that talking about this complex influence would require these youngsters to have some

reflective cognitive capacities regarding their relational functioning (Piaget, 1981). On the other hand, from a social developmental psychological perspective, these teens are dealing with the themes of self-governance, separation and connectedness (Beyers *et al.*, 2003; Kagitcibasi, 2005). That is, these youngsters are still close to their parents and, at the same time, searching for autonomy in the relationship with their parents. Consequently, this study's research question might well be close to their living experience. Older adolescents probably have more developed meta-cognition for thinking about their interpersonal influence, but they are less engaged in the relationships with their parents as other developmental themes (e.g., peer relationships) have become more important.

In conclusion, the rationale of this study is summarized as follows. Starting from the core systemic premise that processes of interpersonal influence are crucial for human and relational development, this study focuses on the children's influence in the bidirectional parent-child relationship. Research on bidirectionality indicates the importance of children's influence for the development of the child and the parent-child relationship. Moreover, from a co-constructionist perspective, the importance of meaning constructions for human and relational development is emphasized. Consequently, the research question is: what meanings do children and parents construct regarding the children's influence on their parents? Consistent with a co-constructionist approach, similarities and differences between the children's and parents' meanings are studied. This research does not focus on parent-child interactions at the behavioural level, but instead focuses on *meaning construction* in the parent-child relationship (Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997). Therefore, we conducted in-depth interviews with children and parents − more specifically, with one child and one parent of the same family. The

interviews were conducted separately with each child and each parent, which allows the participants to stay close, in an idiosyncratic way, to their experiences and meaning constructions.

METHOD

Interpretative phenomenology

This study was purely explorative in nature and sought to answer the question: what do parents and children of the same family think about the influence of children on parents? Therefore, we used the interpretative phenomenological approach as described by Smith (1995), a deductive qualitative research method (Gilgun, 2005). This method takes a middle position between a phenomenological perspective (e.g., Giorgi, 1995) and a symbolic interactionist perspective (e.g., Denzin, 2002). Focusing on the lived experiences and meaning constructions within day-to-day community relationships (such as family relationships), this method emphasizes the ontology − i.e., what it means to be human − in these relational contexts. In line with this approach, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted.

Participants and recruitment

For the sampling of the participants, we focused on the autochthonous Caucasian population of Flanders. Flanders is a multicultural (though predominantly Caucasian) society, and it would be most interesting to study children's agency in the various cultures that enrich Flanders' society. However, the subject of research was quite new to us, and so we decided, as Caucasian researchers, to start within a more familiar cultural context.

A two-way system was used for recruitment and selection of the participants. First of all, participants were recruited through an

advertisement in a weekly magazine. Secondly, and for reasons of convenience, we also included some acquaintances of the researchers as participants. We decided to involve both known and unknown participants because, especially with regard to the interviews with the children, this made it possible to determine whether the child's familiarity with the interviewer had an impact on the interview data. Participants were selected for diversity in age, gender, level of education, profession, marital status and family situation. Finally, 30 children (*age range* = 11 to 15 years; *M* = 13.3; *SD* = 1.2) and 30 parents (*age range* = 37 to 52 years; *M* = 43.55; *SD* = 2.6) were selected for the interviews, in each case one child and one parent of the same family. Twenty-one families lived in an urban or suburban area, nine families lived in a rural area. Socio-economically, all families belonged to the middle class.

Regarding the sample of the children, 12 boys and 18 girls participated. Three children attended elementary school, six attended technical and vocational training for 12-16 year-olds, six were in junior secondary technical school, and 15 children were in secondary school. Twenty-eight children had siblings. Thirteen participants were the eldest child in their family. One adopted child participated. Five children's parents were divorced, and three of those children lived in step-families (for these children, we interviewed the natural parent).

Regarding the sample of the parents, 11 fathers and 19 mothers participated. Eleven parents had a university degree, 11 had attended a college of higher education, and 8 parents had had vocational training. Two parents were unemployed. The occupations of the other parents were very diverse: e.g., cleaning woman, university professor, physiotherapist, shop assistant, teacher, construction worker, social worker. Fourteen of the 30 families were known to the researchers.

The researchers

The first author (male), a 45-year-old child psychologist and trained family therapist with extensive experience in child and family therapy, conducted the interviews. The interpretation of the results of this study has been facilitated by this experience. The second author (female) is a 38-year-old university professor and relationship researcher with experience in both qualitative and quantitative research. Both researchers are parents. As a family therapist, the first author was struggling with the therapeutic issue of how to acknowledge the influence children have on their parents and in this way to recognize the immense responsibility of parenthood in our society; and, at the same time, how to make room for the children's influence on their parents by recognizing their partnership and agency in the relation with their parents. As therapists, can we find words to help us create with our clients narratives concerning these constraining and constructive influences of children? As a researcher, the first author started by assuming equal agency between parent and child. This bias can be problematic, because it can cause the researcher to fail to absorb the participants' stories of inequality. Therefore, the first and second authors made the agreement that, after each interview, the first author, being the interviewer, would give a verbatim account of the interview to the second author, who would then interrogate the interviewer with a scholarly attitude, especially regarding statements of inequality between parent and child. These critical comments were taken along in the next interview.

The interviews

The two researchers constructed the questions by mutual agreement. A twofold objective guided this construction. On the one hand, the questions should be global enough to serve as stepping

stones to yield in-depth data. On the other hand, considering the unusual topic of investigation, the questions should be clear enough to avoid embarrassment for the participants. At the same time, the questions asked of the parents and the children should be complementary, because the objective of the analysis was to compare the children's and parents' data. Consequently, and after rigorous discussion, the following questions were constructed. The objective of the first set of questions (children's questions 1 and 2, and parents' question 1) was to introduce the topic in a global way but at the same time to concretize by asking examples. The reason for constructing two questions for the children and only one question for the parents was a consideration about the different perspectives of children and parents: we thought it would be easier to talk about how one is being influenced than to talk about one's own influence, especially for early adolescents. The aim of the next set of questions (children's question 3, and parents' questions 2 and 3) was to introduce difference in the family regarding children's influence in order to give the participants a stepping stone to detail the children's influence. We decided not to ask questions of the children about their siblings' influence on their parents, because we thought the sibling relationship might be too close or affected to help the participating children to talk about their influence. The objective of the following questions (children's question 4, and parents' question 4) was to introduce a perspective from outside the family, inviting the participants to think from an observer position. To conclude, and taking an even broader perspective, questions were constructed regarding the socio-cultural status of children's influence (children's questions 5 and 6, parents' questions 5 and 6).

The questions we asked the children were:

1. Can you tell me something about the influence you have on your parents, what influence you have and how you are influencing them?
2. When do you have the impression you are really influencing them, and can you give some examples?
3. Is the influence you have on one parent different from the influence you have on the other parent?
4. Do you sometimes notice that your friends have influence on their parents, and how can you notice this?
5. Is this the first time you have talked with someone about this subject?
6. Do you find it difficult to talk about this subject (and if so, why do you think it is so difficult)?

The questions we asked the parents were:

1. When I ask you to think about the influences your child have on you, what can you tell me about this, can you give me some examples?
2. Are you influenced in a different way by each of your children, and if so, does this have an effect on the way you behave towards them?
3. Do you notice a difference in the way you are influenced by your child and the way the other parent is influenced by him or her?
4. Do you sometimes observe how another child is influencing his parents and what these influences are, and can you give me some examples?
5. Do you have the impression that other people can see the influences of your child, and if so, when are these influences apparent to other people?
6. Is this a subject you can talk about with other people?

It should be noted that these questions were merely stepping stones to co-construct the interview with the participants (Branco & Valsiner, 1997). Consequently, other questions emerged during the process of dialogue between the participants and researchers. For example, some children explained that parents learn things from their children. Hence, as researchers, we learned to include this theme more explicitly in the interviews with other children. As a consequence, these children taught us other dimensions of their influence.

The interviews were carried out at the homes of the participants. On average, they lasted about 30 minutes for the children and 90 minutes for the parents. Analysis revealed that this vast difference in length was not associated with the interviewer's familiarity with either the child or the parent participants. We shall return to this subject in the discussion section. The interviews were audio taped. Before the interview started, the participants were informed about the aims of this study and signed a written consent. Although the informed consent of the parents included permission to interview the child, the children also signed a personal informed consent.

Analysis

The interviews were written out by the interviewer immediately after the interview. Usually one day after the interview, the interviewer gave the verbatim account of the interview to the second author, and first reflections were discussed. Next, the interviewer performed the analysis on the texts, which followed the stages described by Smith (1995). To start, one transcript was read a number of times and general reflections were written down. Next, key words that captured the essential quality of the participant's statements regarding child influences were noted in the margin. At the

same time, the themes were listed on a separate sheet. Then, the themes were discussed with the second author and attempts were made to cluster them under master themes. Each time a master theme emerged, previous material was checked to see whether the master theme could capture what the participant actually said. After the list of master themes was produced, the verbatim text referring to a master theme was marked. Then, the second transcript was analyzed in the same way. Some material referred to existing themes and master themes, for other texts new themes and master themes emerged. The clustering of the emerging themes always took place in the dialogue between the two researchers, so nuances in meaning could be discussed until consensus was reached. During further analysis, attempts were made to create higher-order themes. These analyses were performed on the children's data and the parents' data separately. With regard to the levels of analysis, we opted for classification in tandem with complexity and ambiguity. Classification means trying to range meaning units or themes that emerge out of the data. At the same time, following a dialectical perspective (Valsiner & Cairns, 1992), complexity and ambiguity were sought between and within the themes.

Although this is not regarded as a validation process in Smith's (1995) interpretative phenomenological approach, we decided to discuss the results of our analysis with five participating children and their parents who had also participated in the study. The interviewer did so by presenting the higher-order themes of the children's analysis to the children, and the higher-order themes of the parents' analysis to the parents, and asking them for comment. These comments were discussed again with the second researcher. This feedback revealed no significant discrepancies with regard to analyses of the data.

RESULTS

Analysis of the children's texts yielded four higher-order themes; analysis of the parents' data created three higher-order themes. Each higher-order theme has been given a name and will be discussed referring to verbatim quotes from the participants. Conscientious analysis revealed no discrepancy between known and unknown participants.

Children

Difficult but obvious and even important. All of the children stated that talking about their influence on their parents is a difficult exercise. The difficulty is reflected in an ambiguity they reported. On the one hand, it is difficult because it is unusual. It is more natural to experience the opposite direction of influence (from parent to child) and so it is difficult to find the appropriate words to describe child-to-parent influence. On the other hand, the children argued that they had never thought about it because it is so obvious that they influence their parents. They seem to take their influence for granted, as it is simply part of the relationship with their parents.

> Girl (15 years): 'I have an influence, but I wouldn't know how. It is difficult to talk about, you never think about this, it is so obvious. But I think my parents have more influence on me than I have influence on them.'

In addition, they noticed the importance for their own person of a sense of influence regarding their parents.

> Girl (11 years): 'It's important to have this feeling towards your parents − I cannot explain it, but it is important.'

At the end of the interview, several children emphasized the pleasantness of the exercise.

> Boy (12 years): 'This is the first time I've ever talked about this in this way. It's a bit strange, but I like it.'

Interestingly, many children sent e-mails afterwards with comments they had forgotten to give during the interviews.

The concept of influence: influence versus power and intentional versus unintentional influence. A conceptual issue concerns the difference between power and influence. All of the children were very clear about this topic: influence is broader than power or getting parents to do something by using some strategies. Having an influence is not the same as controlling your parents. Sometimes it can mean controlling them, but this is only one small part of the influence concept.

> Girl (14 years): 'Having an influence on your parents is quite different from getting them to do something. Influence is just the way you are and how you are doing things. When you are trying to get them to do something, you are not quite the person you really are, you are only busy trying to persuade them. If one were to act this way all the time, then nobody would know who she/he really is.'

In line with the difference between influence and power, the children referred to their influence as mainly unintentional. Much of the influence children have on their parents is disconnected from their intentions. Children postulated that, without having a particular intention or without any intention at all, they have an influence on their parents just because they have a certain effect or outcome. Because influence is disconnected from intentions, some children stated that they always have an influence in the relationship with their parents. On the other hand, sometimes their influence is indeed conscious or intended. The children usually referred to their intentional influence as getting the parents to do something or doing something they know in advance the parent will like. In other words, intentional influence coincides with the power side of the influence concept.

> Boy (15 years): 'There are two kinds of influence: conscious and unconscious. Conscious means that you are trying to get them to do something. Unconscious means that, although I didn't ask them to do it, they are doing it nonetheless. I don't always have to ask things explicitly, it is more a kind of feeling. Unconsciously, they are always taking me into account.'

> Girl (14 years): 'It is totally different from getting them to do something. You can have an influence that you didn't want. I think there is always an influence, and getting them to do something is on purpose. Even a child that is neglected or unwished for has an influence, an object has no influence. A child that is unwished for has

> an influence on his parents: namely, that it is unwished for.'

Interestingly, when children talk with one another about this influence, they talk only about the power side. The participating children were unanimous about this. The influence one can have on parents is not a topic of conversation among youngsters, with the exception of the power aspect: how one deals with parents to get them to do something. In conversations among the children, the notion of influence equals control or power.

> Girl (11 years): 'I can talk with my friends about how we can deal with them (parents), not what to do exactly, but they give advice about what you certainly should not do.'

> Boy (14 years): 'When we talk with one another about this, it is about how we can handle them. So I've told them I failed one exam, if this is not the case, then it will certainly be okay.'

Responsiveness of the parents. The children talked extensively about the effects of their influence that they observe in their parents. Observing an effect in a parent seems to give them a sense of influence. The younger these teens are, the more perceptible their effects need to be in order for them to derive a sense of influence. Younger children reported having influence when their parents listen to them, when they do something special or uncommon, when they get angry, when they help, when they are proud, when they spend time with the children, when they are concerned, when they use the same language as the children.

> Girl (11 years): 'My mum is very proud because I am a good gymnast.'

Older teens interpret the behaviour deployed by their parents more actively to derive a sense of influence. These older children think they have influence on their parents when the parents are interested in the children's hobbies and ask questions about them, when the parents try to understand the children's opinions, when the parents empathize with the feelings and ideas of the children. The capacity of older children to change parents' ideas is a recurring theme. In order for these children to observe the influence they have on their parents, the parents must actively cope with the children's opinions: just listening to the children's ideas is not enough. Parents have to take the children's ideas and opinions into account − although the children do not think it is necessary that the parents fully adopt their ideas in order to have influence.

> Girl (14 years): 'It's important that they take my opinion into account. Influence also means that my opinions and my parents' opinions melt together and make a whole of it.'

Some children held strong views, stressing that parents are obliged to take the influence of their children into account.

> Girl (13 years): 'It's very important that parents listen to you. When a child reaches a certain age, parents are obliged to take the child's opinion into account.'

Thus, an essential point is that these early adolescents seem to infer their influence from the responsiveness of their parents. They interpret their effects in terms of the commitment and concern of their parents. The participating children talk in particular about effects that are constructive for the relationship with their parents and for themselves. One could call this the reflexive side of influence: the influence the child has on the parents tells the child something about his/her personality. When parents are interested in the child's opinion, the social significance of the child is confirmed (i.e., the child is someone with interesting ideas). Influence is then conceptualized in a truly bidirectional manner: being a significant person in the relationship by influencing the other person. This interpersonal significance refers to the child as a social being and goes beyond the parent-child relationship.

> Boy (15 years): 'It's important to have that sense of influence because it stimulates the relationship with your parents, you can talk more with one another. And I think that when you don't have that sense of influence you have more conflicts with other people.'

Difficulty talking about the contents of the influence. In contrast to the ease with which they described the effects they observed, it seemed difficult for the children to talk about the contents of their influence on their parents. However, explicit questioning resulted in the following themes. Some children postulated that parents can learn much from them in a wide variety of areas: things learned at school, fashion, music, electronic equipment, evolutions in the world, manners, and the habits of young people in society.

> Girl (14 years): 'They learn a lot from us: computers, email, fashion, music. If we wouldn't be there, they wouldn't know anything about these things.'

One girl took a quite extreme stance, maintaining that at a certain age the parent and child roles reverse and the child starts educating the parents.

> Girl (13 years): 'Until the age of ten, your parents educate you, but above this age you educate your parents. When you become 12 or 13 years old, you start to have your own opinions and you pick up ideas from society that your parents aren't very aware about, that's not their cup of tea anymore. So, you are re-educating your parents, and you can be more successful with one parent than with the other one [this girl went on to explain that the re-education process was much easier with her father than with her mother].'

Some children observed a great variety of influences on the lives and personalities of the parents: their time investment, material and financial investment, inner life, responsibility, personality, marital relationship and even the burden on the parents. With reference to the personality of the parent, some stated that parents learn to control themselves by educating children.

> Boy (14 years): 'It's like the father of a girl I know, he is such a macho, and he would have continued to be a macho if he wouldn't have had children. Now, he also

> has a kind of responsibility, and he owes that to his children.'
> Girl (14 years): 'Parents learn to control themselves when children are going too far.'
> Boy (15 years): 'We teach them to look at things in a different way. If you don't have children, it's difficult to stay in touch with young people − as a parent, it's more easy.'

Some children mentioned that they mirror some of their parents' characteristics or personality traits, and thus reinforce the relationship.

> Boy (12 years): 'My dad thinks I've got the same kind of humour as he has, and he finds it great!'
> Girl (14 years): 'Sometimes my daddy looks at me and then he grins in a way and then I ask him what's the matter and he says: in my early days, I would have acted in just the same way.'

It is important to underline that the children did not automatically speak about these contents. All contents arose during the co-constructed interview process between child and researcher.

Parents

Although parents were instructed to think about the influence of the participating child, most of them talked about the influence of 'the children'. All parents indicated that talking about the subject was difficult yet a relief. Some parents expressed anger at the beginning of the interview, stressing that their children are not in charge. There is a great deal of ambivalence in the parents' answers.

Sense of involvement and influence on the development of the person of the parent. Parents indicated that children constantly appeal to a sense of involvement of the parent regarding the person of the child. This means that the parent continuously feels a sense of responsibility, a compelling engagement in a long-term project and long-term care. Regarding this sense of responsibility, parents referred to an on-going future-oriented (feed-forward) attitude, whereby goals need to be formulated and reformulated in a flexible way, in addition to financial and material responsibility. Many parents talked about the enormous time-investment. Some parents stressed the intensity of the engagement, which can also be frightening, and an educational fatigue at times. At the same time, these parents emphasized the sense of having this unique bond and particular involvement as a fundamental existential experience. Like the children, parents can feel the existential dimension of influence.

> Mother (43 years): 'It's a continuous sense of responsibility you have, and it's for a long-term project… In a way, you are always asking yourself the question: 'What would this mean for my child?' In one way or another, he is − not continuously, but very often − present in my mind… You have your own objectives, but every child confronts you with his own questions, so you have to adjust your goals… Sometimes it's more difficult than I thought it would be, but at the same time it's a unique experience − I wouldn't have missed it for anything.'

All parents accentuated the huge influence on their personality. Parents talked about this experience as a duality: as an enriching and, at the same time, curtailing influence. Parents also referred to this

influence in a global, not in a concrete, way. ‘Global’ means the overall impact that having children has on one’s personality. Like the children, parents primarily talked about this influence as unintentional on the part of the child. It seemed to be difficult for the parents to talk about the concrete influences that children, or a specific child, have on a parent’s personality. Only a few parents did so. None of the parents could talk about how their child’s influences impact their concrete interactions with their child. In contrast with the children, parents can give language to the influence from their children, but this is not reflected back in the daily interactions. The following themes were discussed.

Parents talked about the development of their creative and solution-directed thinking and their capacity to organize things practically. As a parent, one must always have answers.

> Father (45 years): ‘When I make a remark, my daughter will overwhelm me with all kinds of arguments. That’s not easy, but it also has a positive side: I’m obliged to justify my reasoning, it has to be coherent and structured. And sometimes, indeed, it’s not easy to admit, but I can realize I’m wrong.’

Another theme concerns the development of the social and relational network. Being a parent provides a special kind of solidarity, one belongs to the group ‘parents’, so one builds up other social contacts. This also has an influence on the relationship one has with one’s own parents. One can start looking in a different way at one’s own parents and education: one becomes milder but also more critical. In contact with other people, the assessment of situations becomes more complex, trying to understand some situations and accusing others less

rapidly. In addition, the influence on the marital relationship was discussed. Differences between the personalities of the parents can become more visible, which can give rise to tensions and developmental opportunities at the same time. Children force the parents to work on their relationship as a couple.

> Mother (44 years): 'Before the children are born, you make agreements with your partner. But as a parent, you have to learn to negotiate, to make compromises. And to make compromises, you may differ with your partner, but the differences have to be within a respectable range. Sometimes it's disenchanting to see how differently he [my husband] thinks about certain matters.'

Parents also stressed the influence on their professional career, namely the responsibility to maintain continuity in your employment. On the other hand, children can also function as a lightning rod for the stress of work.

And finally, yet importantly, parents reported a lot of influences on their emotional life and world-view. Priorities and values are getting confused. As a parent, one can build up self-confidence while, at the same time, one is confronted with his own objectionable habits. Children mirror aspects of the parents' personalities, which can be positive but also confusing. Children can make the parent feel proud and embarrassed.

Regarding the emotional life and world-view of the parent, a most central theme concerns the experience of not having control and not knowing. This complicates the views on relational functioning and is enriching in that respect; and, on the other hand, it makes a parent vulnerable. Parents learn the difference between the efforts they make

(and the intentions they have) and the outcomes: they learn that people are simply not controllable.

> Mother (38 years): 'In the beginning, you think that raising kids is the same as housekeeping: when you do your best, everything will be okay. But after a certain period, you notice that it doesn't work like that. You cannot keep things under control, because you are dealing with another person. The older they get, the stronger their personality becomes, and the less you can keep things under control.'

Feelings of detriment, vulnerability, need for acknowledgment and experience of limited influence on children's education. In line with the theme of 'not having control and not knowing', some parents − not many, and mostly at the end of the interview − reported feelings of detriment: feelings of having missed things in life, restriction of freedom, the burden, feelings of helplessness and doubt, the grief when one fails and the feeling of being disillusioned. These parents accentuated the vulnerability of being a parent, that one is dealing with difficult and often uncontrollable things, while at the same time there is a social perception and pressure that says: if you love your child enough, you cannot have problems.

Emphasis was placed on the need for acknowledgment: acknowledgment of the constructive aspects of children's influence as well as of the burden on, and the vulnerability of, the parents. Parents emphasized that others most often notice the influence of children when there are difficulties (a child with behavioural problems, for example), which is not the same as acknowledgment of the burden. Due to this lack of acknowledgment, parents discuss the problems

they are having with their children only with people they can fully trust and other parents in particular. There seems to be little language in our culture for the positive side of children's influence.

> Father (43 years): 'The acknowledgment of others is very important, the acknowledgment of your engagement, but also of your vulnerability and the fact that you are doing things that you cannot control very easily, although they have such an influence on your person.'
> Mother (39 years): 'It's a little bit disillusioning. I had imagined the contact with my daughter totally differently. If I could start all over again, knowing what I know now, I would live childless.'

Also, only a few parents talked about a developing sense that their influence on their children is limited and the fact that the children themselves co-create their own education. Some parents refer specifically to genetic dispositions, age, gender, personality and number of children; others stress the influence of the child in a more general way.

> Mother (43 years): 'People think you have to treat your children in an equal way, but that's not true, because they also influence how they are treated themselves. The fact that a child influences his own education − I can notice this especially in the difference between him and his brother… Not being a parent, you think you can mould your children; as a parent, you learn that the elbow-room is very limited.'

Learning. In contrast to the children, only some parents stressed the fact that they learn things from their children, especially about their culture and habits. These parents emphasized the importance and quality of this learning for their own personal development. This doesn't just mean being interested because a parent has to be interested in his child − this concerns full recognition of the agency of the child within the relationship.

> Father (45 years): 'Children confront you with their world, the world of their youth culture: their clothing, music, and way of thinking… In a very strong way, they keep you informed about how they look at things, in a very fast and direct way. One can say that they teach you to know their culture from inside. And, of course, you can simply learn a lot of things from them − for instance, about computers and other practical stuff.'

DISCUSSION

Summarizing hypotheses with respect to the children's data

In the existing literature, the concept of interpersonal influence is subdivided into three defining parts: intention, behaviour and outcome (Huston, 2002; Levy *et al*., 1998). We find this distinction useful for summarizing our results. First, by having a particular intention, a specific behaviour can be deployed to obtain a desired outcome. Second, even without any intention, a person can have an influence by attaining certain outcomes or effects in the other person. Interestingly, when these early adolescents talk and think about their influence on their parents, they especially talk about unintentional influence and they report about this as existential. In other words, in a research context, where these children were

addressed as agentic persons with the capacity to think about their own relational experiences, they disconnected their influence on their parents from their intentions and were primarily focused on their effects and the responsiveness of the parents. Unintentional influence concerns their being in this relationship: it is existential, has nothing to do with control or power, and is always present but difficult to talk about. These findings suggest that there is not much language available for talking about unintentional influence because it is too self-evident. As Huston (2002) observes, there is no parallel concept in social psychology for unintentional influence, as power is linked to intentional influence.

However, when these issues were talked through in the research context, the children discovered some language regarding influence on the person of the parent and the relationship. In their narratives about their (unintentional) influence, children seem to define influence as a dialectical process: influence is not exerting pressure on the parents to fully adopt the children's wishes or points of view (that is, parents do not have to comply); but, on the other hand, it is not enough for parents to only listen. Parents have to take the opinions of their children into account − this concerns accommodation and negotiation between children and parents to co-construct a new approach in the relationship that is viable for both and that will be challenged in the future. This view of children's influence corresponds with recent dialectical theories on bidirectionality in parent-child relations (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006), in which agency and influence are primarily understood as processes of accommodation and negotiation and not only as processes of compliance. In addition, when children are together they only talk about the intentional or control dimension of their influence. There is indeed language to talk about this power side. But, children also feel

that this power side is completely inadequate to describe their influence in the relationship, although sometimes it is also important to feel a certain control in the relation with your parents.

Summarizing hypotheses with respect to the parents' data

The parents' data confirm previous research conducted in this area. Parents acknowledged the massive influence of children on their personal development and relations (Ambert, 2001; Palkovitz *et al*., 2003) and the experience that children co-create their own education (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). The themes of ambivalence, power and unintentional influence emerged in the parents' interviews as well and facilitate a comparative analysis of children's and parents' data.

Similarities and differences between children's and parents' data

Similarities. First, both children and parents experienced talking about children's influence on parents as a meaningful yet difficult exercise. Meaningful, because it concerns an existential life experience; difficult, because they are not used to thinking about it. It is not common sense. Within our social-cultural discourse, the parent-child relationship is socially constructed too (Hacking, 1998). In these social constructions, there is plenty of room for the influence of parents on children, but not for the inverse direction. Moreover, in our culture parents are seen as responsible for the relationship with their children. Common social perspectives maintain that parents have to influence their children in a constructive way. Yet there is no commonly agreed construction on children's influence. On the other hand, the children and parents fully recognized the existence of this influence. Second, both children and parents felt ambivalence and had difficulty finding words for something that is socially not constructed. In our language, the notion of influence is normally understood as

control. Consequently, asking about children's influence might evoke an offended reaction. Indeed, some parents became angry at the beginning of the interview, indicating that their child is not in charge. Parents seem to struggle with the difference between power and influence (Huston, 2002; Kuczynski, 2003). For some children, talking about their influence was an emotional experience. Children can feel that in our culture they are not overtly allowed to think in this direction of influence − children's influence is not as much a socially constructed self-evidence as the influence of parents on children. Asking children about their influence can be a noncommittal question for them. Thinking about children's influence is not only not common sense, it goes against a cultural discourse about parent-child relationships (Kuczynski *et al.*, 2003). Third, both children and parents primarily talked about unintentional influence. Parents experienced the influence of children on their personal development as unintentional on the children's part. When children and parents talked about intentional influence, they talked about power or control. In fact, the parents did not really talk about this power influence from their children; instead, a few parents mentioned it during the interview. Neither the children nor the parents could talk about constructive intentional influence from children. There does not seem to be much language in our culture for talking about this positive intentional side.

Differences. Parents principally talked about the massive influence on their personality, and they talked about it in a global way. Although parents felt ambivalent talking about the subject, they poured their heart out to the interviewer because questions about their children's influence on them had never been asked before, which explains the vast difference in length between the children's and the parents' interviews. In this way, the parents gave language to the

contents of this influence, which seemed to be very difficult − if not impossible − for the children. However, none of the parents could say anything about how this massive influence affected their actual behaviour towards their children or how it influenced the concrete interactions with their children. They had never thought about it, which emphasized the novelty of the subject. On the other hand, the children did not recognize their overwhelming effects on the personalities of their parents, but assessed their influence according to their parents' responsiveness. In this respect, the children were focused on the concrete behaviour of their parents, interpreting their effects with regard to their own personality and the quality of the relationship (the reflexive side of influence). After explicit questioning, they could verbalize some contents of their influence, especially the fact that parents can learn much from them. This content was less pronounced in the parents, while for children it seemed to be an important aspect of their agency in the relationship.

In sum, talking about children's influence on their parents, children and parents seem to teach us something about the relational concept of influence. Children and parents co-construct children's influence as mainly unintentional, adding another dimension of influence in parent-child relations. Children and parents use the distinction between agentic (intentional) and non-agentic (unintentional) influence to construct child influences. However, non-agentic influences are not constructed as inferior to agentic influences. In fact, children and parents are talking about a *sense* of non-agentic (unintentional) influence. In the research literature a difference is made between agentic behaviour and sense of agency (Cummings & Schermerhorn, 2003; Kuczynski *et al*., 1999), with sense of agency referring to control beliefs. In a similar way a difference can be made between non-agentic behaviour and a sense of non-agentic influence.

In addition to a sense of agency, a sense of non-agentic influence is crucial in children's and parents' constructions of processes of influence in the parent-child relationship. By approaching influence as an unintentional process beside the traditional intentional (power) view, room is made for a dialectical view of influence in relationships in which there are primarily processes of accommodation and negotiation and, to a smaller degree, processes of compliance (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006). This dialectical view corresponds with research on parent-adolescent relationships that indicates that this relationship is not an area of constant conflict or a relationship primarily characterized by power (Smetana *et al*., 2006). By making a difference (Bateson, 1979) − inviting parents and children to think about the unusual subject of children's influence − different narratives about influence in families are created by the relationship participants. Moreover, possibly the reason that the participants had difficulty talking about the subject is that children and parents seem to take children's influence for granted, because influence, and primarily unintentional influence, is intrinsic to their relationship. Influence is a relationship notion because it connects people. Although humans always experience relational phenomena, it is not easy for them as individuals to describe these phenomena.

Limitations and future research

Although interpretative phenomenology makes no claim to be exhaustive (Smith, 1995), the researchers have been constrained by the sample. The age group of the participating children was limited. Future research should also focus on younger children and older adolescents. Regardless of individual differences, experience from the interviews shows that the youngest children (11 and 12 years) had a lot of difficulties with the subject. Maybe the questions were too

difficult. Maybe younger children experience their influence in a different way and communicate about this in a non-linguistic way. These questions demand adapted research methods. Probably older adolescents will shift the emphasis and stress other themes. From this developmental perspective, a longitudinal research design is more appropriate.

Because this study was purely explorative, it took a holistic approach. No gender or other differences were taken into consideration. Future research can focus on gender differences, between girls and boys as well as between mothers and fathers. Consistent with our explorative goal, thinking about children's influence in other cultures must be explored. Using a social constructionist approach, diversity in thinking among people (not only children and parents) within and between cultures can be investigated. Influence and agency of children are fascinating subjects that require a multi-method approach (Parke, 2002).

During the interviews the existence of a sense of unintentional influence was constructed. A main issue is how such a sense can be operationalized in future research. A sense includes a consciousness while un-intentionality reflects unconsciousness. This paradox might complicate an adequate operationalization of the construct. Future research should focus on a appropriate methodology to investigate sense of unintentional influence.

Given that interpersonal influence is a central notion in family therapy, these understandings about children's influence most likely have psychotherapeutic implications: how to make room for the influence and agency of the child in psychotherapy and especially family therapy (Lund *et al.*, 2002). Is it possible to create room in family therapy for what we can learn from children, what children are teaching their parents, how parents can cope with these children's

influences in daily interactions and, at the same time, maintain a parenting position? In addition, one can ask whether the concept of unintentional influence is useful for a systemic practice. The process of unintentional influence can be understood as a consequence of Watzlawick's first axiom of interpersonal communication: one cannot not communicate (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967). A corollary of this axiom is that one cannot not influence (Griffin, 2006). When relationship partners interact and communicate, processes of influence are inevitable, which means that persons influence each other continuously, both intentionally and unintentionally. Considering Watzlawick's assumption that psychopathology can be correlated with communication processes between humans, and reflecting upon the inevitability of unintentional influence, the question can be asked: to what extent can facilitating a sense of unintentional influence, or a sense of being unintentionally influenced, among family members be helpful in coping with problems? This issue needs further research. On the whole, we think children's influence is a very fruitful research area, if we are prepared, as "not knowing" adults, to learn from children.

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CHAPTER 3

Understandings of Children's Influence in Parent-Child Relationships: A Q-Methodological Study[2]

Bidirectional models of interpersonal influence in parent-child relationships underscore also the influence of children on their parents. Following a social constructionist approach, the present study explores meanings and beliefs in Belgian-Flemish culture concerning children's influence using Q methodology. Children and adults performed the Q-sorting task. The children-sorts and adults-sorts were analysed separately. Q factor analysis of the children-sorts produced five factors, for the adults-sorts six factors. A central understanding of children's influence for children and adults is the recognition of the full person and partnership of the child in the relation. Children focus on the responsiveness of the parents and stress that parents learn much from them. Adults emphasize the massiveness of children's influence on the parents' personal development.

[2] De Mol, J., & Buysse, A. (in press). Understandings of chilren's influence in parent-child relationships: A Q-methodological study. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships.*

INTRODUCTION

Lollis and Kuczynski (1997) reported about a 9 years old boy who recounted to his mother, “If I look hurt and go to my room after dad gets mad at me, then I know that he will soon come and apologize” (pp. 456-457). This example most likely feels familiar to all parents and all children who are aware of the massive influence children have on their parents. Nevertheless and surprising, this influence of children on parents is hard to describe − there is no word for it − and even harder to study as the literature on this topic is limited. In the present paper we aim to capture the content and meaning of children’s influence on parents, starting from the theory of bidirectional influence in parent-child relationships.

Bidirectional models have become more common in recent research into parent-child relationships (Parke, 2002), whereby in-family socialization processes are no longer approached as unidirectional parent or child effects. Bidirectionality stresses the co-occurrence of both directions of influence − from parent to child and from child to parent − in a complex reciprocal system (Kuczynski, 2003). As Maccoby (2003) argues, bidirectionality goes beyond the two main unidirectional effects to assert that parents and children continuously change each other in an ongoing transactional process. In these mutual processes of influence, parents and children are partners in the development of one another and the relationship.

There is a large body of research on bidirectionality and reciprocity in parent-child relations (Pettit & Lollis, 1997) in several different domains, such as developmental psychology (Crouter & Booth, 2003; Kuczynski, 2003), research on parent-infant communication (e.g., Trevarthen & Aitkin, 2001), and the sociology of childhood (Morrow, 2003). Despite diversity in the conceptualization of bidirectional influence in research on

socialization, two general approaches can be distinguished (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006; Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997): the *behavioral perspective* (Patterson & Fisher, 2002), which considers bidirectionality as reciprocal exchanges of behaviors producing linear change, and the *cognitive dialectical perspective*, which considers bidirectionality as a process of meaning construction between humans producing transformational change (Holden & Hawk, 2003; Lawrence & Valsiner, 1993; Smetana, 1997). The notion of human agency is central to this cognitive dialectical perspective on bidirectionality (Kuczynski, 2003). Agency is a multifaceted construct (Bandura, 2001), referring to the human capacity for initiating purposeful behavior to influence the other and the ability to interpret these relational experiences and to accommodate future behavior according to these constructs of meaning.

Recent proposals on bidirectionality in parent-child relationships emphasize the equal agency of parents and children (Kuczynski, Harach, & Bernardini, 1999). In addition to the comprehensive research on parenting, research on children's agency has also received much attention in recent years (Crouter & Booth, 2003; Cummings & Schermerhorn, 2003). A bidirectional framework on parent-child relations must add a child-to-parent direction of influence to the widely accepted parent-to-child influence (Kuczynski & Navara, 2006). Research on children's agency shows how children drive the interaction with their parents (e.g., Kerr & Stattin, 2003), influence their own socialization by influencing parental strategies (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994), and influence many aspects of the parent's personality (Ambert, 2001; Palkowitz, Marks, Appleby, & Holmes, 2003).

In sum, there is burgeoning evidence for reciprocal influences in the parent-child relation and for the importance of children's

agency in this bidirectional relationship context. However, little research has focused on the cultural understandings of children's influence in the parent-child relationship. The present study aims at exploring such understandings in Belgian-Flemish culture.

Basic relationship theory (Hinde, 1997) stresses the reciprocal influences between the various levels of social complexity, i.e., individual, interaction, relationship, group and socio-cultural structure. Referring to Hinde's theory, Lollis and Kuczynski (1997) argue how social interactions construct the relationship level, while the context of the relationship forms the dynamics for the interaction level. In a similar way, culture can be understood as a dynamic context for the development of relationships (and other levels), while socio-cultural contexts are created by humans, their interactions and relationships. Although several theoretical frameworks account for the nature of the interpenetrating processes between the various levels of social life (Deaux & Philogène, 2001), culture is defined as founding and constituting human life. Culture is understood as a complex of meanings, a semiotic space, and a set of practices that represent these meanings (Markus & Plaut, 2001).

In this study, we adopt a social constructionist approach (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Social constructionism asserts that people construct reality through social interaction. As people engage in a process of construction, their knowledge never objectively reflects external reality but is instead a negotiated creation of meaning. We negotiate and interact with each other through language, and in this process we create meaning constructs or shared understandings. These understandings, or common sense knowledge, constitute the semiotic space in which we feel, act and think. By acting upon − and interacting in − this world of meaning, constructs are reproduced and changed, emphasizing the dynamic nature of the process of social

construction. The core of social constructionism is language. Drawing on Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy, language does not represent a world outside language. Language can only exist in social interactions and, in these contexts, language creates meaning and, consequently, reality. As Gergen postulates: "It is human interchange that gives language its capacity to mean, and it must stand as the critical locus of concern." (Gergen, 1994, p. 264). From this point of view, reality does not exist outside language (Gergen, 2001). There are many versions of social constructionism in very different scientific fields (for a review, see e.g., Pearce, 1995). Some theoretical approaches, like Gergen's, take a radical ontological position, claiming that there is no reality "out there". Other approaches are less radical (e.g., Hacking, 1999). We embrace the approach of Jovchelovitch (2001). In a critical essay on the semiotic dimension of social representations, she advances the thesis that reality is larger than what we socially construct. The issue is that symbolic knowledge, as the crucial process of cultural production, is central to reshaping and representing reality and producing meaning out of it. That is, the creation of shared understandings as the semiotic space in which we live is of central importance to human social life, and this is perfectly consistent with a reality that exists outside our constructions. In the present study, we investigate children's and adults' understandings and meanings of children's influence in the bidirectional parent-child relationship. Consonant with social constructionism, these understandings and meanings are not only constructed in the parent-child unit, but in other contexts and social interactions as well. Therefore, childless adults also participated in this study.

This study elaborates on a phenomenological study (De Mol & Buysse, 2007) in which we focused on how meanings concerning children's influence are co-constructed in the parent-child relation. A

co-constructionist view (Valsiner, Branco, & Dantas, 1997) belongs to the cognitive perspective on bidirectionality and is especially useful for studying meaning construction in the parent-child relationship, since parents and children are seen as thinking subjects acting in a relationship where meanings are co-constructed regarding oneself and the other in the dialectical processes of the relationship. These meanings and expectancies are cardinal to the development of the parent-child relationship (Bugental & Johnston, 2000). In that phenenomenological study, 30 parents and 30 children, one parent and one child from the same family, were interviewed concerning the influences the child can have on his/her parent. These semi-structured interviews were conducted separately with each parent and each child. The children's ages ranged between 11 and 15 (M = 13.3; SD = 1.2); 12 boys and 18 girls participated. The ages of the parents ranged between 37 and 52 (M = 43.55, SD = 2.6); 11 fathers and 19 mothers participated. The results support a dialectical perspective on parent-child relations (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006). Parents and children describe the children's influence as parents *trying* to understand their children, *taking into account* children's ideas, and *learning that there are several ways to love one's child*. Children's influence does not exert pressure on the parent to adopt children's wishes or points of view completely. Instead, it concerns accommodation and negotiation to co-construct a new approach in the relation that is viable for both parties and that will be challenged in a future episode. In this respect, influence covers a different reality than that of power and control.

The phenomenological study focused on processes of meaning construction in the parent-child relationship and not on understandings concerning the content of children's influence. The latter is the focus of the present study. Because construction of the meaning of issues in the parent-child relationship goes beyond this relationship, a broader

social constructionist approach was chosen. The aim of this study was purely exploratory; we sought to answer the question: what meanings and beliefs exist in Belgian-Flemish culture concerning children's agency? Considering children as fully agentic implies the assumption that, as human beings with their own agentic features, children construct other meanings and beliefs than parents. We therefore asked children and adults separately to inform us about their meanings and beliefs about children's influence in the bidirectional parent-child relationship.

METHOD

Q methodology

Performing a broad social constructionist analysis requires a methodology that is designed to investigate variety and diversity in understandings within a particular culture. Q methodology meets these requirements (Stainton Rogers, 1995). Participants are asked to rank a sample of statements (Q set) concerning the subject of research to a quasi-normal distribution (Q sorting task). Then, the Q sorts are correlated and factor analyzed (Q factor analysis), resulting in different factors that represent distinct and shared understandings concerning the subject. The aim of Q factor analysis is to look for diversity in cultural understandings concerning the issue of research. The focus is not on the participants themselves, as Q is not designed to provide information about the proportion of people representing a particular understanding. Within Q methodology, participants must be perceived as collaborators and not as subjects under investigation. The aim is to describe a population of ideas and not a population of subjects (Risdom, Eccleston, Crombez, & McCracken, 2003).

More specifically, Q methodology is well designated to explore diversity in understandings in a systematic way, but it is not

suited to address the issue of representativeness of particular understandings for certain classes of people. Research questions regarding representativeness demand an appropriate methodology with larger samples. Q methodology combines however the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Brown, 1996), because factor analysis is used to explore human subjectivity. However, as for qualitative research in general, Q methodology can only give indications concerning issues of representativeness. At least two issues are then important for the interpretation of the findings of the present study. First, the number of Q sorts loading on a particular factor does not refer to the spread of that factor in the population. Instead, diversity of factor exemplars gives only an indication about the spread of the particular understanding in society. Second, consistent with our social constructionist approach, the sample of adults contained parents and non-parents in order to generate as much diverse factors as possible, which is the main goal of Q methodology. Comparative analyses between understandings of parents and non-parents are only indicative and should be interpreted cautiously. In sum, Q methodology is well suited to systematically identify understandings in our society, but can only give indications regarding spread and representativeness of understandings, as these issues need further testing with appropriate methodology and larger samples.

Development of the Q set

A variety of understandings was generated by examining a number of different sources. First, the data of the phenomenological study (De Mol & Buysse, 2007) were used. Second, semi-structured interviews concerning the influence of children on their parents were administered to 20 professionals (psychologists, psychotherapists, researchers, and teachers). Third, research literature concerning child

effects and agency of children was examined. Finally, popular media and websites were searched. Based upon these sources, we produced as many statements as possible relating to children's influence. Three hundred statements were generated and subsequently examined by the researchers with regard to their significance and clarity. Similar statements were removed. After discussion, a final set of 82 statements was selected for the Q set and each statement was given a number at random. This set is shown in Figure 1. More specifically, Figure 1 exemplifies the distribution of the 82 statements in the final Q sort, after Q factor analysis, of the first factor (Factor 1) of the adults.

Participants

For the sampling of the participants, we focused on the autochthonous white population of Flanders. Flanders is a multicultural society and it would be most interesting to study children's agency in the various cultures that enrich Flanders' society. However, the subject of research was quite new to us, and so we decided, as white researchers, to start within a more familiar cultural context.

Within the cultural context, participants were selected for diversity. For the phenomenological study (De Mol & Buysse, 2007), participants were recruited through an advertisement in a weekly magazine. Because the response was substantial, many volunteers could not participate. Some were contacted again to participate in this Q methodological study, based on diversity in age, gender, level of education, profession, marital status and family situation. For this Q study, children and adults were not allowed to belong to the same family. Moreover, there was no kinship between the adults and/or the

children. Enlisted participants were asked to suggest other possible participants in a limited snowballing technique.

Finally, 30 children (*age range* = 11 to 15 years; *M* = 13.17; *SD* = 1.2) and 31 adults (*age range* = 18 to 67 years; *M* = 38.22; *SD* = 12.45) were selected to perform the Q sorting task. Thirty participants are recommended as a minimum to achieve stability in the factor structure (Brown, 1980). The age range of the children (11 to 15 years) was the same as for the preliminary investigation to develop the Q set; 16 girls and 14 boys participated. Six children attended elementary school, three children special education school, 10 children secondary school, and 11 children junior secondary technical school. One child had lost one parent and lived alone with her mother. Six children's parents were divorced, and four of those children lived in a step-family. Twenty-seven children had siblings. The occupations of the parents of the participating children were very diverse: labourers, employees, public servants and independent professionals. Three parents were unemployed, and one parent was mentally disabled. For the selection of the adults, no attempt was made to exclude childless persons: 17 women and 14 men performed the Q sorting task, of which 18 were parents (nine mothers and nine fathers). On the whole, five students participated (all childless), 2 participants were unemployed (both childless persons), 3 participants had retired (one childless person and two parents), 2 participants were housekeeper (both parents), and 19 participants worked outside the home (five childless persons and 14 parents). Three participants were divorced (one childless person and two parents). Regarding the civil status of the adult participants, 17 participants were married (two childless persons and 15 parents), 6 participants cohabited (four childless persons and two parents), and 8 participants lived alone (seven childless persons and one parent).

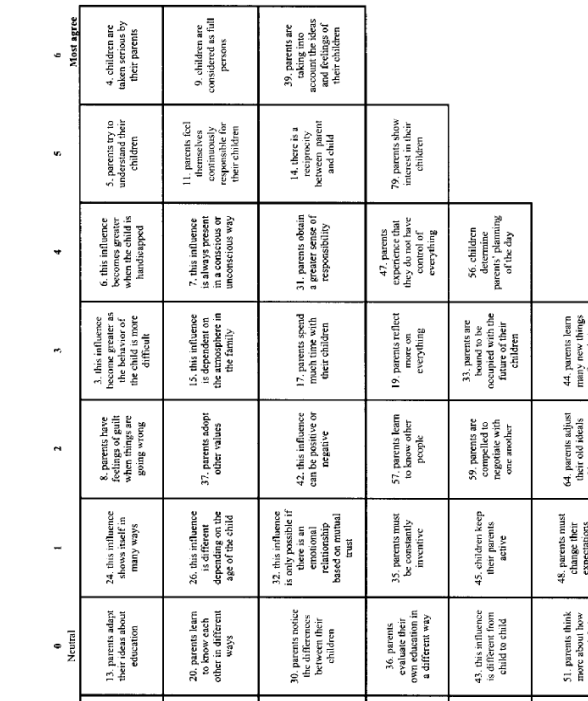

Figure 1. 82 statements in final Q-sort arranged as Factor 1 (Adults)

Again, the occupations of the participants were very diverse (e.g., kindergarten teacher, welder, engineer, nurse, architect, cook, and shopkeeper). The level of education of the participants ranged from technical training to higher education. Thirteen participants had completed technical or vocational training, 4 participants had graduate school, 5 participants were students at a university or a college of higher education, and 9 participants had higher education.

Procedure

The Q sorting task was carried out at the participants' homes. After noting the biographical information, the researcher explained the procedure, and the participants signed an informed consent. The participants were instructed to prefix each statement with 'influence of children on parents means to me that…' and to rank the statements to a quasi-normal distribution, sorting them into a profile ranging from -6 (most disagree) through 0 (neutral/irrelevant) to + 6 (most agree). Statements were presented at the participants in numerical order. Moreover, the number of items to be placed under each category was specified in advance, as can be seen in Figure 1. That is, three items for -6 and +6, four items for -5 and +5, five items for -4 and +4, seven items for -3 and +3, eight items for -2 and +2, nine items for -1 and +1, and 10 items for 0. After performing the task, the participants were encouraged to give comments on the statements and their choices in sorting, a helpful and recommended procedure for the interpretations of the factors (Stenner, Dancey, & Watts, 2000).

RESULTS

Analysis and interpretation

Thirty-one Q sorts of the adults and 30 Q sorts of the children were separately entered into PQ Method, a program specifically designed for Q factor analysis (Schmolck, 2005). The adult-sorts and children-sorts were analyzed in an identical way. First, an intercorrelational matrix was calculated by correlating all Q sorts. Next, this correlation matrix was subjected to a Centroid factor analysis, with the objective of creating an original set of (unrotated) factors. Then, these factors were rotated using a varimax procedure to arrive at a final set of factors. To be considered as a Q factor, a factor had to have an eigenvalue greater than 1 and at least two Q sorts that loaded significantly on it alone and not on other factors (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Q sorts that load significantly on the same factor alone are called factor exemplars (Stenner et al, 2000) and can be understood as sharing a similar understanding represented by that factor. A standard practice for Q methodology is to generate from the factor exemplars an 'ideal' Q sort representing a factor by calculating the Z-scores for each statement defining that factor. Based on these Z-scores, statements can be attributed to the original quasi-normal distribution, producing a Q sort of a hypothetical respondent with a 100 % loading on that factor. This 'ideal' Q sort is called a factor array and can be seen as an ideal representative of that factor. These factor arrays are key to the interpretation of the factors. Therefore, in the interpretations of the factors, the rankings of the items of importance for interpretation of a factor (more specifically the extreme rankings, i.e., +6, +5, +4, -6, -5 and -4) will be given in brackets. In addition to the factor arrays, individual comments and biographical information of the participants with factor exemplars are

other important sources for factor interpretation. As mentioned above, the number of factor exemplars should be interpreted very cautiously in terms of representativeness of the particular understanding in the population. In Q methodology the focus is on the content and distinctiveness of the factors. Hence, several participants with factor exemplars are mainly advantageous as creative sources to facilitate factor interpretation. In addition, because Q has explorative goals and aims at exploring diversity of understandings, factors with a single factor exemplar can be interpreted if theoretically salient (Watts & Stenner, 2005). In the present study, two factors with a single factor exemplar (factor D and factor 4) were also interpreted.

Q factor analysis produced five factors for the children-sorts, and six factors for the adults-sorts. In the description of the factors, the first number between brackets refers to the item number, while the second number indicates the ranking.

Children

Factor A: 'Children are full relationship partners in the parent-child relationship, recognizing that parents learn much from them. Eight factor exemplars illustrate this factor. These children indicate the meaning of their influence as the parents' recognition of children as full persons and partners in the relation. Parents must take their children seriously (4: +6), show interest in them (79: +6), and try to understand them (5: +5). In particular, the fact that parents learn much from their children (44: +5) is highlighted, along with reference to the parents' personality development (31: +5; 67: +4). Reciprocity in the relationship is necessary to blossom this agency (14: +4) and parents need to accommodate to their children (70: +4). Moreover, children stress the difference between power and agency (80: -6; 23: -

5) and do not regard their participation as a burden for the parents (73: -5; 49: -5; 65: -4; 28: -4).

The 8 participants who exemplify this factor cover the total age range (11 to 15 years) and are from both sexes (5 girls and 3 boys). The understanding of children's agency as full persons and partners in the relationship seems to be widespread and ingrained among children. A 13-year-old girl expressed it pithily: 'Parents have the obligation to listen to their children!'

Factor B: 'Parents are continuously concerned about and focused on their children'. Seven factor exemplars illustrate this factor. These children emphasize continuous parental involvement regarding their children. Children seem to infer their agency from the engagement (17: +6) and concern (54: +6; 79: +5; 5: +4) of their parents. Parents cannot easily withdraw from this influence, as it regards an ongoing influence (7: +5), and parents will feel guilty when things go wrong (8: +4). This influence is moderated by child variables (6: +5; 1: +4; 3: +4) − for example, a handicapped child will require more intense engagement. Moreover, children's influence is a natural (human) phenomenon and independent of relational qualities (32: -5) or cultural factors (2: -5). Again, this influence also differs from power (80: -6) or manipulation (23: -6).

The 7 participants who exemplify factor B have different ages (range from 12 to 15 years) and are from both sexes (2 girls and 5 boys). These children are primarily focused on the responsiveness of the parents, as a 13-year-old boy explained: 'I can see I have an influence when my dad comes to watch my football match.'

Factor C: 'Parents love their children and feel continuously responsible'. Two factor exemplars illustrate factor C. This factor elaborates on the theme of engagement described in the previous

factor. Besides the time investment (17: +6), parents are bound to be occupied with the future of their children (33: +6) and have a continuous sense of responsibility (11: +5). Moreover, the exhausting (65: +5) and constraining (49: +4; 51: +4; 56: +4) effects of this influence are recognized. The meaning of children's influence touches the fundamental commitment of the parent. These children indicate they can feel their influence if they experience an unconditional parental love, which they also derive from the effort on the parents' side. Once more, this influence differs from power or control (80: -5; 50: -5; 21: -5), but reciprocity between parent and child is important (14: +3).

The 2 participants who exemplify this factor are both younger boys (11 and 13 years old). They did not comment on the Q sorting task explicitly.

Factor D: 'Parents become more sensitive to the social context and comments of others'. One factor exemplar illustrates factor D. This factor indicates that children's influence goes beyond the parent-child interactions. Parenting develops within a social and cultural context, so parents must adjust their ideas about education (13: +6) and become more sensitive to the opinions of others (58: +6). Being a parent means to think more deeply (19: +5), to learn that your own influence on your children is limited (21: +5), and to constantly update your own ideas (72: +4). In contrast with factor A, this factor does not concern specific influences of children regarding their parents (4: -6; 51: -5; 56: -5) or the fact that parents can learn much from their children (39: -4; 44: -4). The development of the parent is also dependent on social and cultural influences, which can be triggered by a particular child (43: +6; 26: +4).

The participant who exemplifies this factor is a 15-year-old girl whose parents are divorced. She stays with her father. The Q sorting task was a difficult and emotional experience for her. She talked about the complexity of the situation. She was especially upset and angry about the many comments her father had to endure from others, even though he took good care of her.

Factor E: 'Children's influence, although self-evident, is often neglected'. Two factor exemplars illustrate factor E. These children indicate a duality. On the one hand, children's influence is an everyday reality. This influence is always present (7: +5), can be positive or negative for the parents (42: +6), and manifests itself in many ways (24: +4). On the other hand, this influence is often neglected. In our culture, attention is primarily given to parental influences (71: +6) and even for parents it can be hard to accept children's influence (78: +5). However, this lack of awareness of children's influence is not justified, because this influence does not concern irrelevant matters (38: -6). Once more, children's agency differs from power (80: -6; 23: -4) and is situated in the reciprocal relationship (14: +4).

The 2 participants who exemplify this factor are a 15-year-old girl and a 12-year-old boy. The girl stated that parents cannot deny the influence of children on their personal lives, but it is much more difficult for them to consider the opinions of their children or to admit they learn things from them. The boy goes to a special education school. He and his parents are in family therapy. He enjoyed doing the Q sorting task but gave no comments. Maybe his pleasure was connected with the many positive statements presented in the Q set, an unusual way of thinking about children's influence when the parent-child relationship is problematic.

Adults

Factor 1: 'Children are full persons and partners in the relationship'. Eight factor exemplars illustrate factor 1. These participants strongly indicate the recognition of the person and partnership of the child in the parent-child relationship. Influence of children means that children are taken seriously by the parents (4: +6) and are regarded as full persons (9: +6). Parents can demonstrate this by considering the ideas and feelings of the children (39: +6), trying to understand them (5: +5), and showing interest (79: +5). Parents must recognize that children's influence does not pertain to unimportant matters (38: -6) and that it differs from manipulation (23:-6) and domination (80: -6). Hence, parents should not have difficulty accepting the existence of this influence (78: -6), recognizing the relevance of this influence to their own development as well (31: +4; 47: +4). The issue of the parent's personal development is further elaborated in other adult factors. This factor highlights the constructive side of children's influence. It does not regard the burden on the parents or the sorrow they may experience (27: -5; 65: -5). A final theme concerns the importance of the relationship context for the development of children's agency. Children's influence is dependent on recognition of the reciprocity between parent and child (14: +5).

Of the 8 participants exemplifying this factor, 5 are parents (2 mothers and 3 fathers) and 3 are non-parents (2 women and 1 man), with an age range of 19 to 50 years, both labourers and highly skilled persons. This understanding of children's influence does not seem to be limited to a certain class of people and has more to do with a developing recognition of children's agency in our culture. As a participant (39 years old, father and welder by occupation) stated: 'They [his children] know so much and can do so much, it's

incredible, and they dare to give their opinions. I don't have a problem with that, although I don't always agree.'

Factor 2: 'Children's influence is pertinent today and constructive for the parents'. Four factor exemplars illustrate factor 2. These participants indicate that children's influence is more significant now than it used to be in the past (68: +6) and is bound to our culture (2: +5). Hence, the individual contribution of the child itself is accentuated (26: +6; 43: +5; 34: +4). At the same time, this influence is regarded as constructive and instructive for the parents, in such a way that parents must constantly be creative (35: +5), learn much from their children (44: +4), and are kept active by their children (45: +4). There seems to be an acceptance, not explicitly pronounced, that this influence requires some effort of the parents (74: -6). Again, this influence is situated in the reciprocity between parent and child (14: +5), but an emotional relationship based on mutual trust is not required (32: -6).

Interestingly, the 4 participants who exemplify this factor are all non-parents with a university education. One of these participants, a 66-year-old retired economist, emphasized that children gain influence in modern society. For example, currently children take part in deciding the choice of school or how the vacation is spent, what was impossible in his young days.

Factor 3: 'In this joint process between parent and child, parents gradually learn more about themselves'. Two factor exemplars illustrate factor 3. These participants indicate children's gradual influence on the thinking, the emotions and the personality of the parents. This influence is dependent on the age of the child (26: +6) and can be positive or negative for the parent (42: +6). With regard to the contents of this influence: parents find that they need to

adjust their old ideals and become more realistic (64: +6), they do not have control over everything (47: +5), the influence affects the emotions of the parents (46: +5), the parents recognize aspects of their own personality (67: +5), and the parents re-evaluate their own education in their family of origin (36: +4). Again, this influence is attributed within the relationship in such a way that it is dependent on the atmosphere in the family (15: +4) and that an emotional relationship based on mutual trust is essential (32: +4) − which is not surprising, because, in contrast with factor 2, this factor concerns the personality of the parent itself. Although this influence is not always pleasant for the parents (42: +6), it is a constructive influence in the sense that it has nothing to do with dominating (80: -6) or manipulating (23: -5) the parents, or the fact that parents go through much trouble and difficulty (27: -6) or regularly experience failure (66: -6).

The 2 participants who exemplify this factor are both young adults (21 and 24 years old, man and woman) and non-parents. In their comments, they emphasized their influence on the personality growth of their parents. Performing the Q sorting task seemed to trigger some very personal matters within these young adults. Maybe this has to do with the fact that they have recently gone through the developmental phase of adolescence.

Factor 4: 'Children's influence does not only affect parents' but also children's own development'. One factor exemplar illustrates factor 4. This participant indicates that both parent (62: +6) and child (40: +6) learn much about themselves through children's influence. With reference to the parents' learning process, the contribution of the child is recognized in the way parents try to understand their children (5: +5), adopt things from the children's social world (53: +5), and

accommodate their ideas about education (13: +4). This parental process of individual development seems to have an ambivalent nature. On the one hand, the parents' great investment of energy is acknowledged − parents get very tired (65: +6) and are forced to keep their job (60: +5); on the other hand, parents become more self-confident (61: +5) and more serene (74: +4). Although this factor is situated within the relationship, the interaction between parent and child is less emphasized. On the contrary, the individual development of the partners is accentuated. This individual development pertains to personality growth and has little to do with practical matters like spending money (51: -6) or planning the day (56: -6).

The participant who exemplifies this factor is a 67-year-old retired grocer with adult children. At the end of the Q sorting task, he stated that in his experience it is important for children to receive enough space so that they can become autonomous − and, therefore, we must approach them seriously. He regarded this as an obligation for the parents. In addition, parents must not be dependent on, or rely on, their children. Parents must be able to take care of themselves.

Factor 5: 'Parents are not only committed to the current development of their children, but also to a continuous feed-forward responsibility'. Three factor exemplars illustrate factor 5. These participants indicate that children's influence means that parents feel obliged to be engaged in the future of their children (33: +6). Parents are committed to, and continuously occupied with, their children (79: +6; 45: +5), and as the relationship progresses (26: +5) they gain a greater sense of responsibility (31: +4). This is not a noncommittal attitude, because parents are forced to negotiate with one another (59: +4), to act forcefully when necessary (25: +4), and when things go wrong parents will have feelings of guilt (8: +4). This influence seems

to be even stronger when the child is handicapped (6: +5), which again demonstrates the compelling engagement. Children seem to appeal to a sense of responsibility that is inescapable for the parents. Again, this influence is situated in the reciprocity of the relationship (14: +5). Although it concerns an obligation for the parents, it is not pressure (80: -6), and parents do not have to justify themselves regarding their children (41: -6).

The 3 participants who exemplify this factor are a 66-year-old housekeeper (mother), a 50-year-old labourer (father), and a 36-year-old physical therapist (woman, non-parent). In their comments, the 2 parents emphasized the continuous engagement and lasting care. As the mother stated: 'In one way or another, you are always thinking of them [your children]… you always feel a responsibility.' The non-parent stated that her childlessness was a deliberate choice: she could not see herself being constantly engaged in children.

Factor 6: 'Children's influence inevitably involves a burden on the parents and their request for appreciation'. Two factor exemplars illustrate factor 6. This factor is different from the others in that it accentuates the hardships and difficult aspects of children's influence. Children restrict the freedom (49: +5) and privacy (28: +4) of the parents, so parents also have less time for each other (73: +4). The influence of children is explicitly regarded as exhausting for the parents (65: +6), and when the child is handicapped the burden is even greater (6: +6). However, it seems important to stress this dimension of children's influence, not as a negative impact on the parents' development (62: +5; 44: +4), but rather because parents need recognition from others for their commitment and effort (29: +6). This influence differs from children's power (41: -6); it regards another

dimension of the parent-child relationship, which needs recognition and exists beside the emotional dimension (32: -6).

The 2 participants who exemplify this factor are a 19-year-old male student (non-parent) and a 36-year-old speech therapist (the mother of two pre-school children). For a number of years, the woman and her partner lived together without children. Both invested much time in their work and hobbies. She emphasized the restriction of freedom and the inescapable responsibility that children entail, but she also accentuated the development of an emotional relationship with the children as something that co-exists with the burden.

DISCUSSION

This study investigates meanings and beliefs that exist in Belgian-Flemish culture concerning children's influence on their parents in the bidirectional parent-child relationship. Analysis shows similarities and differences between the children's and adults' factors.

We think the following *similarities* are to be taken into consideration:

First, a most central understanding of children's influence is the recognition of the full person and partnership of the child in the relation. Both adults (factor 1) and children (factor A) highlight this meaning of children's agency. This core meaning pinpointed a basic principle of bidirectionality: namely, the equal agency of parents and children (Kuczynski et al., 1999). Agency of children is socially constructed as a belief that children are full partners in the relationship, and that parents are interested in them, listen to them, try to understand them and take their ideas and feelings into account. This belief demonstrates an equivalence of agency, although parents' agency is intrinsically different than children's (Dix & Branca, 2003).

Second, in both children's and adults' factors, children's influence is clearly distinguished from power, a distinction discussed at length by Kuczynski (2003). In not a single factor is children's agency constructed as dominance, manipulation or control. Adults recognize the burden on the parents (factor 6) and children believe their influence can be exhausting and constraining for the parents (factor C). Nevertheless, even these factors differ from power. Difficulties and troubles are perceived as an essential part of children's influence, but in the cultural understandings this burden is not equated with dominance. A hypothesis is that when the burden and constraining influences of the child become intolerable for the parents (for example, influence of a child with severe conduct disorders), the chances multiply that children's influence will be constructed as power. This issue needs further research regarding social constructions of children's agency in troubled parent-child relations (Kent & Pepler, 2003).

Third, both children (factors B and C) and adults (factor 5) focus on the commitment and concern of the parents. In the constructions about their influence, children seem to derive their agency from the responsiveness of their parents, especially the involvement (factor B) and, even stronger, the love (factor C) they can feel and experience from the parents. The meanings of children's influence seem to be related to the connectedness children feel towards their parents. Research indicates that, in adolescent development, the autonomy of the adolescent and connectedness with the parents are separate, but not incompatible, dimensions (Beyers, Goossens, Vansant, & Moors, 2003). On the contrary, connectedness is considered to be important for an adolescent's development. In children's understandings about their influence, relatedness with the parents is of central importance. The question arises whether

children's emphasis on parents' responsiveness must be associated with the children's age group. Early adolescence is viewed as a phase where adolescents developing towards autonomy and identity are still closely connected with their parents (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). On the other hand, in the adults' understandings as well, the commitment and engagement of the parents are accentuated (factor 5), taking into account the fact that the adults' meaning constructions are not related to a specific development phase but represent a more holistic understanding about children's influence. In sum, the question as to whether the importance of the parents' commitment still remains significant in the understandings of middle and late adolescents' influence needs further research.

Fourth, in several factors (C, 2, 3, and 5) − but especially in the central factors A (children) and 1 (adults) − reciprocity in the relationship is designated as important for the development of children's agency. This means that children's influence emerges out of the relationship context. This is in line with recent bidirectional theories on parent-child relationships, where agency is understood as a property of close relationships (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006).

The following *differences* between children's and adults' understandings are discussed. Regarding the content of children's influence, adults accentuate the impact on the parents' cognitions, feelings and personality (factors 1, 2, 3, and 4). In addition, adults believe that these intrusive influences of children are prominent in our society today (factor 2). That is, children's influences are not only massive for the parents, but also inevitable: a parent cannot not feel children's influences. Adults seem to construct children's agency as essential and of great importance for the personal development of the parents. Interestingly, the factor exemplars for factors 2 and 3 (the factors that stress children's influence on parents' personality) are all

non-parents. Although the recognition of the full person and the partnership of the child in the relation with his/her parents is a shared understanding (factor 1), it seems to be more difficult for parents to specify the content of children's agency. This is in line with the results of the phenomenological study (De Mol & Buysse, 2007). Analysis of the parents' interviews showed that parents recognize children's influence on their personal development but are much more focused on the commitment and engagement that children call forth (a meaning also reflected in the broader adults' understandings in this Q study, i.e., factor 5). In fact, none of the parents in the phenomenological study talked about how the child's influences on the parent's personality influenced the parent's actual interactions with the child. Although the observed difference between parents and non-parents is in line with the results of the phenomenological study, this issue needs further research.

These adults' understandings regarding children's influences on the personality of the parents are not reflected in any of the children's factors. The massiveness of children's influence is not constructed in the children's beliefs. From this point of view, it is understandable that children do not appreciate the burden on the parents, a factor explicitly present in the adults' beliefs (factor 6). Children only assess a kind of vulnerability with the parents in such a way that parents become more sensitive to social influences (factor D), and this entails an indirect influence from the child. On the other hand, a distinct understanding among children is that parents learn much from them (factor A). Although adults acknowledge this learning influence (factor 2), it is much more explicit in the children's beliefs.

We suggest the following hypotheses regarding this difference. In the first place, as children focus on the responsiveness

of the parents (factors B and C), a most perceptible effect is what they can teach their parents. Children seem to emphasize their active contribution. Whereas in the adults' understandings children's agency entails merely eliciting certain developments with the parents, children emphasize their active and goal-oriented (Valsiner et al., 1997) influence, which is demonstrated by the fact that parents learn from their children. Moreover, within a cultural primacy of unilateral parental influence (Kuczynski, Lollis, & Koguchi, 2003), an important task of parenting is to create an environment for the child that facilitates processes of internalization (Grusec, 1997). Parents have to teach children and, by serving as a good example, children can learn from them. Within this socially constructed meaning of influence, children can sense their influence when parents learn from them. It seems to be more difficult for adults to notice this meaning of children's influence, as they are wrapped up in a parenting discourse. In sum, concerning the content of children's influence, whereas adults accentuate the impact on the parents' personality, this belief is absent in the children's understandings. On the other hand, whereas children stress the fact that they can teach parents many things, this understanding is less expressed in the adults' beliefs.

Another difference between the children's and adults' factors concerns an ambivalence children indicate concerning their agency (factor E), which is absent in the adults' beliefs. On the one hand, children postulate that influencing the parents is self-evident; on the other hand, this is a culturally neglected reality. There is not much language in our culture for thinking about children's influence (Kuczynski et al., 2003). In the adults' beliefs, this cultural negligence is absent, although adults do recognize the parents' request for appreciation (factor 6). Adults seem to be preoccupied with the massiveness of children's influence and the resulting responsibility

(factor 5) and burden (factor 6), so they did not explicitly assess the cultural negligence of children's agency.

Two other differences to be discussed regard the adults' factor 4 and the children's factor D. Although only one factor exemplar illustrates these factors, we take them into consideration because we think they are theoretically salient. The adults' factor 4 postulates children's agency as important for the parents' but also for the children's development. The importance of children's influence on their parents to the personal development of the child is not reflected in the children's beliefs. In a culture where language is lacking concerning children's agency, it is difficult for children to construct their influence as constructive for their own development. On the other hand, it is surprising that only children seem to assess that their influence is going beyond the relationship with their parents (factor D). This meaning of children's influence is absent in the adults' beliefs. Probably adults are so focused on the commitment and responsibility children call forth, that it is difficult for them to acknowledge a broader societal "children"-influence. This is in line with the absence of a cultural negligence of children's influence in the adults' beliefs and the lack of language to describe children's agency in our culture. Acknowledgement of children's agency does not only mean to appreciate children's influence in the daily parent-child interactions, but also to recognize "children-hood" (like parenthood) in our culture. We suggest that children-hood differs from childhood, because childhood principally refers to a time span in life with all kinds of associations of being young. On the other hand, children-hood recognizes children as full agentic persons and partners in the parent-child relationship, with children's own specific contributions and influences, as parents have their "parenting" contributions in the relationship with their children. In a similar way, Valsiner and

colleagues (Valsiner et al., 1997) introduced the notion of "filiating" to counter the unidirectional parenting claims in our culture.

In sum, in both the adults' and children's understandings regarding children's agency, the full person and partnership of the child in the relationship is highlighted, although the emphasis differs. In the adults' beliefs, children's influence is principally constructed as having a massive impact on parents' personality and the continuous commitment and burden that such influence entails. In these adults' constructs, there is little room for the active contribution of the children, as children's influence is mainly constructed as eliciting developments from the parents. In the children's beliefs, children's influence is more actively constructed as parents learning things from children and children deriving their agency from the responsiveness of the parents. Moreover, as agentic human beings (Lee, 1998), children can actively assess the cultural negligence of their agency in the parent-child relationship. While scientific evidence exists for the importance of children's influence in the bidirectional parent-child relationship, cultural understandings about children's agency reveal that the social construction of children's agentic features is in an embryonic stage of development. A hypothesis concerning this lack of language about children's agency in our social-cultural discourse is that there is a linguistic inadequacy for specifying the difference between power and influence (Huston, 2002). Adults and children are unanimous that children's influence differs from power, but then the question presents itself: how to define influence? This issue needs further research.

Limitations

Although Q methodology makes no claim to be exhaustive (Stainton Rogers, 1995), one limitation of Q methodology is that the

researchers are constrained by the sample of the Q set as well as by the sample of the participants. Our sample of participants was limited to the native Flemish population. Even though Flanders is part of a Western culture, differences within and between Occidental cultures are significant. Flanders is a multicultural society and children's agency must be studied in the other cultural contexts, searching for similarities and differences. Another limitation of the sample concerns the age group of the children. We chose early adolescents for the development of the Q set and the performance of the Q sorting task. Younger children as well as older adolescents could have revealed other themes about their agency, and consequently could have affected the development of the Q set. Other understandings probably would have emerged, because the children as well as the adults would have performed the Q sorting task with another Q set. Using a longitudinal design, future research could investigate children's agency beliefs during the different developmental phases.

This study was purely exploratory and took a broad social constructionist approach. Other possibilities are to concentrate on the differences/similarities between parents and childless adults regarding understandings of children's agency, or between birth parents and step-parents. Q methodology offers many possibilities for studying variety in cultural beliefs. However, Q methodology is not appropriate to study representativeness of particular understandings in certain classes of the population. Q methodology is well designated to explore variety, yet other methodologies with larger samples are necessary to tackle questions about representativeness. Moreover, Q methodology is not appropriate for studying the processes of social construction. Again, and making a plea for methodological pluralism, other qualitative and quantitative methods are required to study these complex influence processes. Children's agency and influence are

fascinating subjects that demand a multi-method approach (Parke, 2002).

Another important limitation of this study regards the use of self-reports, because this method can involve inaccuracies. Moreover, no generalization can be made regarding actual behaviors of children and parents and other participants, as the connections between humans' beliefs and behavior is complex and not linear.

Finally, these understandings have important psychotherapeutic implications: how to make room for the agency of the child in family therapy? This much-needed research can make a valuable contribution towards bridging the gap between the world of relationship research and psychotherapeutic practice.

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CHAPTER 4

Processes of Interpersonal Influence in Family Systems

In this chapter interpersonal influence in family systems is investigated using the Social Relations Model (SRM; Kenny & La Voie, 1984). The purpose of this study was twofold. The first aim was to investigate family members' subjective *sense* of interpersonal influence using SRM. The second aim was to objectify interpersonal influence in family systems with the purpose to perform SRM analysis on nonsubjective measures of interpersonal influence. Therefore the present chapter is subdivided into two parts. Part 1 describes the research on family members' sense of interpersonal influence. Part 2 reports on the research of the objective measures of interpersonal influence. Both parts have a substantial overlap for theoretical background, participants and procedure, and design and measures. Consequently in Part 2 the reader will be on multiple occasions referred to Part 1 to avoid repetition.

PART 1: SENSE OF CONTROL IN FAMILY SYSTEMS: SOCIAL RELATIONS MODEL ANALYSES OF INTENTIONAL AND UNINTENTIONAL INFLUENCE[3]

This study examined family members' beliefs about their ability to influence each other. Following Huston (2002), a distinction was made between intentional and unintentional influence. The question was whether family members' sense of intentional influence and sense of unintentional influence are constructed by the same or different factors of family dynamics. Therefore the Social Relations Model (Kenny & La Voie, 1984) was used. Fifty two-parent two-child families filled out questionnaires in which intentionality and valence of the outcome were manipulated. SRM analyses gave similar results for sense of intentional and sense of unintentional influence. Mainly actor and relationship factors generated significant variance, indicating that characteristics of the actor and the unique actor-partner fit are systematic sources of these senses of influence.

[3] De Mol, J., & Buysse, A. (2007). Sense of control in family systems: Social relations model analysis of intentional and unintentional influence. Manuscript submitted for publication.

INTRODUCTION

A ‘sense of control’ reflects a person’s beliefs about his or her ability to control or influence outcomes (Bandura, 1997). Without any sense of control, people would be unable to understand one another or to plan (re)actions. Sense of control is therefore strongly related to interpersonal influence (Cook, 2001), the process by which relationship partners affect and change each other’s thoughts, behavior and emotions (Huston, 2002). This interpersonal influence is the essence of close relationships, because, “We would not say a relationship is close unless two people have influence on each other for a relatively long period of time.” (Huston, 2002, p. 170).

Influence can be intentional or unintentional (Huston, 2002). Intentional influence refers to the process by which a relationship partner, to obtain particular effects, intentionally generates action to change the other partner’s thoughts, behavior or emotions. In contrast, unintentional influence is the process by which relationship partners affect one another without particular goal-directed intentions. The process of unintentional influence can be understood as a consequence of Watzlawick’s first axiom of interpersonal communication, “one cannot not communicate” (Watzlawick, Jackson, & Beavin, 1967). A corollary of this axiom, at least within interdependent relationships, is that one cannot not influence (Griffin, 2006). When there is interdependence, processes of influence are inevitable, both intentionally and unintentionally, because each person’s behavior has consequences for the other (Kelley, 1979). This understanding of interpersonal influence also represents a basic principle of systemic psychotherapy (Hedges, 2005). However, that people continuously influence each other does not imply that people always have a sense of control. The basic question of the present paper is how this continuous

flow of (intentional and unintentional) influence relates to the sense of control in family relationships.

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the role of a sense of control in interpersonal relationships (Hay & Fingerman, 2005), or more specifically parent-child relationships (Kuczynski, 2003) and family relations (Cook, 1993, 2001). In these studies, sense of control is typically understood as intentional influence, insofar as it reflects people's beliefs about their ability to persuade or convince one another, or their ability to act strategically in order to obtain desired goals. Kuczyncski's 'agency' concept (2003), for example, refers to the initiation of purposeful or goal-directed behavior, and thus to intentional influence. Likewise, Cummings' and Schermerhorn's (2003) sense of agency refers to intentional influence and sense of control (Maccoby, 2003).

Little research, however, has focused on people's unintentional influence in family relations (T.L. Huston, personal communication, January 9, 2007), and intentional and unintentional influence in families have rarely been studied together (Hsiung & Bagozzi, 2003). Nevertheless processes of unintentional influence have been studied in parent-child relations. Proceeding from Bandura's notion of incidental influence (Huston, 2002), parents' unintentional influence has been studied in terms of how children acquire behaviors from observation. Also, in early discussions of child effects on adults (Bell, 1968), children's influence was considered as unintentional to the extent that children were merely eliciting reactions from their parents.

In our own research on the phenomenology of children's influence on their parents, both the children and the parents viewed children's influence as mainly unintentional (De Mol & Buysse, 2007). Children advanced having a sense of this unintentional

influence on their parents as essential for their personal development and relation with their parents. In their narratives, children clearly distinguish influence from control or power. Influence on the parents is much broader than power or getting parents to do something by using some strategies. Children mainly derive a sense of influence from the responsiveness of their parents and not from the accomplishment of certain goals in the parent-child relationship. Also parents described the enormous impact of their children's unintentional influence on their own (i.e., the parent's) person and that having a sense of being influenced by their children was fundamental for the development of the parent-child relationship. By exploring processes of child-to-parent influence, family members become aware of the dimension of unintentional influence, in addition to the more conscious, intentional influence processes in family relations. These findings are consistent with the distinction Kuczynski suggests between agentic and nonagentic influence processes. In the interdependent parent-child relationship (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006), agentic influence refers to intentional action or deliberative construction, and nonagentic influence is identified with automaticity and habit. Kuczynski argues that socialization processes in families consists of both agentic and nonagentic processes and that future models of socialization should account for both processes.

In line with these findings and consistent with Huston's distinction between intentional and unintentional influence (Huston, 2002), we suggest a distinction between a sense of intentional influence and a sense of unintentional influence. Both are relevant to a sense of control. A sense of intentional influence can be described as persons' beliefs about their ability to intentionally influence outcomes (e.g., "I can do things I know in advance the other will like"). A sense of unintentional influence can be specified as persons' beliefs about

their ability to unintentionally influence outcomes (e.g., "I can do things that are unpleasant for the other, without having that intention, but still are unpleasant for the other").

The present study addresses following questions specific to a sense of control in family relations: (1) Do family members have a sense of intentional and a sense of unintentional influence and do family members differentiate between a sense of intentional and a sense of unintentional influence? (2) Are family members' sense of intentional influence and sense of unintentional influence constructed by the same or by different factors? This second question was investigated using the Social Relations Model (SRM; Kenny & La Voie, 1984).

SOCIAL RELATIONS MODEL AND BIDIRECTIONALITY

Interdependence means that people influence each other outcomes (Kelley, 1979). Consequently, a person's sense of control in a specific family relationship, e.g., mother's sense of control regarding her youngest child, is dependent on various factors, i.e., the personality of the mother, the personality of the youngest child, the specific mother-child relationship, and family factors. The family version of the SRM (Cook, 2000; Kashy & Kenny, 1990) provides a means of testing the relative significance of these factors. First, person X's sense of control regarding person Y can be dependent on how person X perceives his/her abilities to influence all family members, independent of the specific relationship. This factor reflects a cross-relational consistency in the beliefs of person X, much like a personality trait. This is called an actor effect in the SRM. Second, person X's sense of control regarding person Y can be dependent on the degree to which person Y is experienced as influenceable by all his/her family members. This factor also reflects a cross-relational

consistency, but in this case a consistency in how other people view person Y. In the SRM this is called a partner effect. Third, person X's sense of control regarding person Y can be dependent on the unique sense of control person X has regarding person Y; that is, it does not reflect more general characteristics of either Person X or Person Y. In the SRM this is called a relationship effect. Relationship effects are directional; the relationship effect from person X to person Y differs from the relationship effect from person Y to person X. Thus, in a family with four members there are 12 relationship effects. Fourth, person X's sense of control regarding person Y can be dependent on the culture of the family or the family effect. Family effects measure similarity among the members of the family system.

Bidirectional theories of parent-child and family relations emphasize the role of reciprocity in the development of relationships (Kochanska, 1997; Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997). The SRM offers the opportunity to measure reciprocity (Cook, 2001, 2003) at both the individual and the dyadic level. At the individual level, reciprocity is measured by correlating the actor and the partner effect of the same individual. For example, a significant positive reciprocity correlation for mothers means that the greater the mother's sense of control in her family relationships, the greater will be the sense of control of family members in relation to the mother. At the dyadic level reciprocity is measured by correlating the relationship effects of the two persons composing a dyad. For example, a significant positive reciprocity correlation for the father-child dyad means that the greater the father's unique sense of control in relation to the child, the greater will be the child's sense of control in relation to the father. Although not part of the standard or basic model, the SRM also provides tests of intragenerational similarities among family members (Cook, 2000; Kashy & Kenny, 1990). Intragenerational similarity can be measured

by the correlation of the actor effects of family members of the same generation (e.g., the correlation of the actor effects of the mothers with the actor effects of the fathers) or by correlating the partner effects of family members of the same generation (e.g., the correlation of the partner effects of the older children with the partner effects of the younger children). A significant positive correlation of the parents' actor effects would indicate that a greater sense of control for mothers goes together with a greater sense of control for the fathers. On the other hand, a significant positive correlation of the children's partner effects would indicate that the more the older sibling affords other family members a sense of control, the more the younger sibling does too.

FAMILY RELATIONS AND SENSE OF CONTROL

The present study elaborates on Cook's (1993) measures of effectance and acquiescence in family relationships. Effectance measures the person's sense that they can influence the partner, and acquiescence measures the person's sense of being influenced by the partner. Both measures were developed as relationship-specific scales that can be used within a round-robin design; one of the designs used for SRM analysis (Cook, 1993). In Cook's study effectance and acquiescence were conceptualized as aspects of intentional influence. Family members were asked, for instance, how much they can convince or persuade another family member (Effectance), or how much they feel controlled by a family member (Acquiescence). As described above, the present study aims at exploring both sense of intentional and sense of unintentional influence. In this study, effectance is distinguished according to whether it reflects intention vs. unintentional influence, and acquiescence is distinguished

according to whether it reflects intentional vs. unintentional influenceability.

Beside the factor of intentionality, another important component of interpersonal influence regards the outcome or the effect of one's influence (Huston, 2002). In this study we focus on the valence of the effect. Specifically, an effect can have a positive or negative valence. One the one hand, a family member can have a sense of having positive effects regarding another family member, reflecting the family member's belief about his/her ability to do things that another family member likes. On the other hand, a family member can have a sense having negative effects on another family member, reflecting the family member's belief about his/her ability to do things that another family member doesn't like. In both cases, the focus is on the perception or evaluation of the family member who is the actor or who is influencing the other. In addition, acquiescence can also be viewed as having a positive or negative valence. A person may feel they have been positively or negatively influenced by another person.

In sum, building on Cook's (1993) research concerning sense of control and sense of being controlled in family systems, in the present study both constructs were investigated by manipulating the factors of (a) intentionality and (b) valence of the effect. This manipulation produced eight constructs: sense of intentional influence with positive effect, sense of intentional influence with negative effect, sense of unintentional influence with positive effect, sense of unintentional influence with negative effect, sense of being intentionally influenced with positive effect, sense of being intentionally influenced with negative effect, sense of being unintentionally influenced with positive effect, and sense of being unintentionally influenced with negative effect. Self-report measures were developed for each construct. First the existence of and

differences between the constructs in family relations were investigated. Subsequently SRM analysis was performed on each construct separately.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

The sample included 50 two-parent families with at least two adolescent children (N = 200). A minimum sample of 50 families has been recommended to perform the described SRM analysis (Kashy & Kenny, 1990). Four family members (two parents and two adolescents) participated in the study. Families were recruited when they had a younger adolescent between 11 and 15 years of age, and an older adolescent between 15 and 19 years of age, and both adolescents agreed to participate in this study. In families with more than two children in these age ranges, parents and children decided who of the siblings was going to participate. Recruitment took place through advertisements in secondary schools and weekly magazines. Families were asked to participate in a study of family communication patterns. Families who agreed to participate were given a standard description of the project (aims and procedure) and were invited to our department. Families who could not come to the university were visited at home. The main reason we wanted to be present when family members filled out the questionnaires was to control for mutual manipulation. Families were paid $20 for their participation. After informed consent was obtained, families were assigned a number to ensure anonymity. All family members then completed a demographics questionnaire and were subsequently instructed to fill out the questionnaire concerning sense of control and sense of being controlled in their family relations.

All participating families lived in Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium. Family members were middle class Caucasian. The mean age of the mothers was 44.43 years (*SD* = 3.23), and their mean number of years of education was 14.72 (*SD* = 1.40). The fathers' mean age was 45.48 (*SD* = 3.94) and their mean number of years of education was 13.72 (*SD* = 2.23). The parents lived on average over 20 years together (*SD* = 3.43). The mean family income was between $47,500 and $60,000. Family size ranged from 2 to 6 children (*M* = 3.06, *SD* = 1.02). For the siblings, the mean age of the older sibling was 17.45 (*SD* = 0.90), and the mean age of the younger sibling was 14.04 (*SD* = 1.15). The mean age difference between the siblings was 3.42 years, with a range from 1 to 7 years. Of the total sibling sample, 37% were boys and 63% were girls. The gender composition of the sibling pairs (gender of older and younger sibling, respectively) was as follows: female−female = 21, female−male = 13, male−female = 8, male−male = 8. The Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Ghent University approved this study.

Design and Measures

In order to perform SRM analysis, a round-robin design was used. In a round-robin design, each family member rates (separately) all of his/her family relationships. Because it was necessary to use equivalent measures for each relationship, eight scales were developed that could be applied to each relationship: one scale for each cell (construct) of our 2 (intentionality: intentional vs. unintentional) x 2 (valence: positive vs. negative) manipulation of Effectance and Acquiescence. Each scale consisted of three items. The intentionality and valence of these variables were manipulated by systematically altering item content to reflect intentional vs. unintentional outcomes

and positive vs. negative outcomes. Inspired by Cook's scales (Cook, 1993) and in order to facilitate the use of the scales across different relationships, the target of the rating was identified by a dotted line in each item. Family members were instructed to mentally insert the name of the target where there was a dotted line. Items were assembled in a 7-point Likert scale format, ranging from 1 (*never true*) to 7 (*always true*).

The items of the four Effectance-scales (for the four constructs regarding sense of control: sense of intentional influence with positive effect, sense of intentional influence with negative effect, sense of unintentional influence with positive effect, sense of unintentional influence with negative effect) were as follows:

INTENTIONALITY AND POSITIVE VALENCE

1. If I want, it happens that I do things that ... finds nice.
2. When it is my intention to do things that ... finds pleasant, I succeed in doing them.
3. It happens that I very consciously do things vis-à-vis ... that he/she finds agreeable.

INTENTIONALITY AND NEGATIVE VALENCE

1. If I want, it happens that I do things that ... *does not* find nice.
2. When it is my intention to do things that ... finds *un*pleasant, I succeed in doing them.
3. It happens that I very consciously do things vis-à-vis ... that he/she finds *dis*agreeable.

UN-INTENTIONALITY AND POSITIVE VALENCE

1. Without my really looking for the outcome, it happens that I do things that ... finds nice.
2. It happens that I do things that ... finds pleasant, without that having been my intention.
3. Without my taking a conscious interest in the matter, it happens that I do things vis-à-vis ... that he/she finds agreeable.

UN-INTENTIONALITY AND NEGATIVE VALENCE

1. Without my really looking for the outcome, it happens that I do things that ... *does not* find nice.
2. It happens that I do things that ... finds *un*pleasant, without that having been my intention.
3. Without my taking a conscious interest in the matter, it [2] happens that I do things vis-à-vis ... that he/she finds *dis*agreeable.

Basically the same items were used for the four Acquiescence-scales (sense of being intentionally influenced with positive effect, sense of being intentionally influenced with negative effect, sense of being unintentionally influenced with positive effect, and sense of being unintentionally influenced with negative effect). However, the personal pronouns were systematically changed to reflect that another family member is now the actor and self is now the target of the influence. For example, the first item of the scale 'Intentionality and positive valence' was changed into: If *mother* wants, it happens that *she* does things that *I* find nice.

In sum, two questionnaires were developed. First, an Effectance-questionnaire was composed using the 12 items of the four

Effectance-scales. The 12 items were presented at random in the final Effectance-questionnaire. Second, an Acquiescence-questionnaire was composed using the same 12 items in the same order as for the Effectance-questionnaire. With the objective to test the clarity of the items in a limited pilot study, the questionnaires were presented to 10 adolescents (age range = 11 to 18 years). They were asked to make comments on the comprehensibility of the items. It was apparent that the notions intentional influence and unintentional influence were obvious for these youngsters. After careful consideration and by mutual agreement with the adolescents, no changes were made to the items.

As the present study focuses on the subjective perspective of the respondent and not on objective processes of interpersonal influence in family systems, self-report measures of sense of interpersonal influence are advantageous. In making their ratings, family members can rely on multiple interactions with each other covering a long relationship history (Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997). The items were therefore formulated broad enough to encompass different relational experiences and participants were instructed to fill out the questionnaires according to their general feeling in a specific relationship.

Missing data

In a round-robin design (Cook, 2001), data may be missing at three levels: (1) the item-within-scale level in which a single item from a particular scale measuring a specific relationship is missing; (2) the relationship-within-respondent level in which a respondent does not report on a specific relationship; and (3) the respondent-within-family level in which one family member does not participate and consequently does not provide any data. Questionnaires were

checked immediately after the participants had completed the task, so that missing data at the second and third level could be prevented, resulting in 50 valid cases.

When an item was missing within a particular relationship, this data point was replaced using the mean of the two other items (this procedure was applied nine times).

RESULTS

Reliability

Reliabilities (Cronbach's α) for the three-item Effectance scales averaged across the 12 relationships were: Intentional-Positive .61; Intentional-Negative .69; Unintentional-Positive .68; Unintentional-Negative .74. For the Acquiescence-scales the average α coefficients were: Intentional-Positive .75; Intentional-Negative .73; Unintentional-Positive .74; Unintentional-Negative .81.

Mean levels

Means and standard deviations for Effectance and Acquiescence are reported in Table 1. In general, family members' mean scores on Effectance and Acquiescence were quite similar, indicating that family members equally assess their sense of influence and sense of being influenced. Across family relationships, means circled around 4.5 (*range* = 3.27−6.00), indicating that family members do have a sense of intentional and unintentional influence and a sense of being intentionally and unintentionally influenced.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Effectance and Acquiescence

Effectance

	Intentional				Unintentional			
	Positive		Negative		Positive		Negative	
Partner	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Mother								
Father	6.00	.69	3.27	1.23	4.77	.86	3.35	.96
Older	5.97	.74	3.36	1.24	4.73	.93	3.41	.91
Younger	6.05	.63	3.45	1.26	4.77	.94	3.41	.92
Father								
Mother	5.67	.88	3.72	1.12	4.48	.98	3.78	1.11
Older	5.33	.89	3.92	1.29	4.41	.96	3.75	1.10
Younger	5.52	.80	3.93	1.31	4.50	.96	3.71	.97
Older sibling								
Mother	5.60	.76	4.21	1.02	4.62	.98	3.95	1.21
Father	5.33	.90	4.21	1.11	4.38	1.00	3.90	1.16
Younger	5.25	.86	4.67	1.05	4.19	.91	3.93	1.02
Younger sibling								
Mother	5.45	.71	3.98	1.06	4.40	1.01	3.96	.98
Father	5.20	.83	3.86	1.05	4.36	.86	3.89	1.03
Older	5.11	.99	4.57	1.14	4.24	.95	4.12	1.09

Acquiescence

	Intentional				Unintentional			
	Positive		Negative		Positive		Negative	
Partner	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Mother								
Father	5.77	.84	3.45	1.00	5.10	.81	3.44	.93
Older	5.66	.85	3.49	1.07	5.19	.85	3.57	.88
Younger	5.75	.79	3.61	1.19	5.15	.94	3.51	1.03
Father								
Mother	5.65	.92	3.81	1.26	4.87	1.07	3.76	1.18
Older	5.23	1.08	3.97	1.14	4.80	1.01	3.93	1.13
Younger	5.63	.85	4.23	1.30	5.10	.78	3.96	1.06
Older sibling								
Mother	5.71	.81	4.18	1.22	4.65	.70	4.13	1.24
Father	5.35	.95	4.55	1.09	4.39	.94	4.25	1.33
Younger	5.20	.97	5.05	1.13	4.36	.99	4.24	.97
Younger sibling								
Mother	5.60	.82	3.81	1.28	4.68	.89	3.79	.97
Father	5.32	.84	3.91	1.20	4.47	.96	3.79	1.05
Older	5.25	1.00	4.67	1.16	4.53	1.05	3.87	1.06

Because the present study focuses on the intentionality and valence of interpersonal influence, analyses concerning the effects of

intentionality and valence on the constructs within the same relationship were performed. A 2 (intentionality: intentional vs. unintentional) x 2 (valence: positive vs. negative) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted for each relationship with intentionality and valence as within-family factors. Dependent variables were family members' mean scale scores for a specific family relationship. Results for Effectance and Acquiescence are reported in Table 2.

Effectance. Large and significant main effects ($p < .001$) for intentionality were found for every relationship and for valence for all but two relationships. All family members reported in each of their family relationships a significantly higher sense of intentional influence than unintentional influence, and, with the exception of the sibling relationship, family members reported a higher sense of positive influence than negative influence. Interaction effects for intentionality and valence were found for all but two relationships. The interaction effects indicate that, again with the exception of the sibling relationship, the effect of intentionality was only evident in the positive valence condition.

In the sibling relationship, a somewhat different pattern was found. Siblings reported in their mutual relationship a higher sense of intentional influence compared to unintentional influence. But valence was less important (in the older-younger sibling relationship) or not important at all (in the younger-older sibling relationship) in their sense of influence towards each other. The interaction effects for the older-younger and younger-older relationships were also non-significant. Thus, the effect of intentionality was not conditional on the valence.

Table 2. Effects of Intentionality and Valence for Effectance and Acquiescence

Relationship	*Intentionality F(1,49)*	*Valence F(1,49)*	*Intentionality x Valence F(1,49)*
		Effectance	
Mother-Father	32.12***	130.16***	57.90***
Mother-Older S[a]	32.17***	110.58***	55.65***
Mother-Younger S	47.85***	108.03***	57.15***
Father-Mother	19.53***	75.65***	38.96***
Father-Older S	22.92***	36.53***	11.76**
Father-Younger S	25.21***	53.42***	14.89***
Older S-Mother	36.93***	33.83***	11.70**
Older S-Father	38.44***	17.68***	11.05**
Older S-Younger S	67.30***	6.00*	2.94
Younger S-Mother	23.76***	37.11***	26.48***
Younger S-Father	17.54***	27.16***	24.60***
Younger S-Older S	43.27***	3.65	3.43
		Acquiescence	
Mother-Father	17.17***	120.30***	16.51***
Mother-Older S	6.67**	88.29***	14.58***
Mother-Younger S	12.41**	76.37***	15.27***
Father-Mother	14.02***	63.93***	12.04**
Father-Older S	4.12*	30.82***	4.33*
Father-Younger S	12.53**	55.87***	2.38
Older S-Mother	35.84***	28.76***	27.90***
Older S-Father	28.28***	5.25*	11.08**
Older S-Younger S	46.44***	.48	.04
Younger S-Mother	17.34***	54.05***	22.20***
Younger S-Father	23.19***	25.50***	16.10***
Younger S-Older S	86.49***	8.47**	.20

Note. [a] S is sibling.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Acquiescence. In general, the results of the MANOVA for the Acquiescence-scales followed the same pattern as those for the Effectance-scales. Intentionality and valence have the same role in family members' sense of being influenced by each other as they do in their sense of influence over each other. For the sibling relationship no significant interaction effects were found indicating that the effect of intentionality was not conditional on the valence. Moreover, in the older-younger sibling relationship the effect of valence was non-significant.

SRM analysis

Eight separate SRM analyses (on the scale scores of the 4 Effectance and the 4 Acquiescence scales) were performed using structural equation modeling (EQS 6.1; Byrne, 2006), in which the SRM components were specified as latent variables in a confirmatory factor analysis. For each SRM analysis, nine latent variables were constructed. Actor and partner factors were estimated for mother, father, older-sibling and younger sibling, and a family factor was estimated for the group.

SRM analysis involves two basic steps (Cook, 1993, 1994, 2001). First, the dependent variables (i.e., the measured relationship scores) are forced to load on each of the SRM factors appropriate to the relationship. For example, a measure of mother's relationship to father would load on the mother actor factor, the father partner factor, and the family-group factor. Factor loadings are usually fixed at 1.00. Second, correlations can be specified between the appropriate SRM components when they have significant variance, indicating reciprocities and intragenerational similarities. For example, the actor factor for mother is allowed to correlate with the partner effect for mother to measure reciprocity (for mother) at the individual level of analysis. In some cases the SRM components did not have significant variance ($p > .10$), so correlations could not be validly calculated (Cook, 1993). These models were re-estimated with exclusion of invalid covariances.

In this study, variance due to specific relationships was not estimated as true factors. Rather, it was left as part of the residual for each relationship after the variance for the actor, partner, and family factors had been estimated. When this is

done the relationship effects contain variance due to errors of measurement. Partitioning relationship variance from error variance requires two parallel measures of each relationship. This was possible in this study because each scale consisted of 3 items (Kashy & Kenny, 1990). But this would have produced 36 variables with 50 cases. The resulting low subject-to-variable ratio and unstable estimates of the SRM factors augured against this approach.

The goodness of fit of the SRM for each construct was evaluated using three widely accepted fit indices: The chi-square value, the RMSEA (Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation), and the CFI (Comparative Fit Index). The CFI was given preference to other fit indices (e.g., NNFI) as it has been recommended for small samples (Byrne, 2006; Cook, 2001). Variance estimates of the SRM factors for the Effectance-scales and Acquiescence-scales are reported in Table 3. Reciprocity correlations for Effectance and Acquiescence are reported in Table 4. In addition, in Table 5 average percentages of the proportion of the explained variance by each SRM effect for every scale are reported. Because of space limitation it was impracticable to report percentages of the explained variance by each SRM effect for each equation in every scale, so average percentages of explained variance were calculated for the single family effect, the four actor and partner effects, and the 12 relationship-error effects for each scale.

Effectance

Intentional-Positive Effectance. Fit indices of the SRM to the data indicated a medium fit, with an acceptable CFI index: χ^2 (50, N = 50) = 76.59, p < .05; RMSEA = .10; CFI = .93. Post-hoc analysis did not reveal meaningful additional covariances. As can be seen in Table 3, the family factor was significant. This means that there are systematic differences between families in family members' sense of intentional positive influence. All actor factors were significant, indicating that family members' sense of intentional positive influence regarding other family members is affected, at least in part, by characteristics of the family member who is the rater or actor. Further, the partner factor of the older sibling was significant, indicating that older siblings vary in the degree to which they

afford other family members a sense of influencing positive outcomes. Eight out of the 12 relationship factors were significant, indicating that, to a reliable extent, a family member's sense of intentional positive influence regarding another family member is unique to the specific relationship. No significant relationship factor was found for two out of the three relationships in which mothers were the raters. That is, mother's sense of intentional positive influence regarding her children is not affected by the specific relationship with her children. Similarly, father's sense of intentional positive influence regarding the older child is not affected by the specific relationship he shares with this child. Finally, the youngest child's sense of intentional positive influence towards his or her mother is not affected by the child-mother relationship. As shown in Table 4, significant reciprocity correlations were found on the individual and dyadic level. At the individual level the actor-partner correlation for the older siblings was significant, indicating that the more sense of intentional positive influence the older siblings reported the more sense of intentional positive influence other family members feel with the older siblings. At the dyadic level a significant reciprocity correlation was found for the relationship between mother and father, indicating that in marital or adult-partner relationships a higher sense of intentional positive influence of mothers towards fathers goes together with a higher sense of intentional positive influence of fathers towards mothers.

To conclude and indicated in Table 5, the variance in sense of intentional positive influence between families is best explained by the actor effects of the family members. Characteristics of the family members as actors accounted for almost half of the variance (48%). Relationship effects were far less important (22%). The family effect (18%) explained more variance than the partner effects (12%). Family members' sense of intentional positive influence is least affected by characteristics of the partner.

Table 3. Variance Estimates and Standard Errors (in brackets) of SRM Factors for Effectance and Acquiescence

Factor	Intentional-Positive	Intentional-Negative	Unintentional-Positive	Unintentional-Negative
		Effectance		
Family	.08 (.04)			
Actor				
Mother	.29 (.07)	1.36 (.31)	.69 (.16)	.70 (.17)
Father	.53 (.12)	1.37 (.31)	.72 (.17)	.76 (.19)
Older S[a]	.35 (.10)	.81 (.21)	.61 (.16)	.95 (.23)
Younger S	.37 (.10)	.59 (.19)	.51 (.14)	.79 (.18)
Partner				
Mother				
Father				
Older S	.05 (.02)			.07 (.03)
Younger S				
Relationship				
Mother-Father	.10 (.04)	.25 (.07)	.19 (.05)	.54 (.12)
Mother-Older S				
Mother-Younger S		.12 (.04)	.07 (.02)	
Father-Mother	.37 (.09)	.33 (.08)	.24 (.07)	.45 (.12)
Father-Older S			.10 (.04)	.14 (.06)
Father-Younger S	.11 (.04)		.09 (.04)	.18 (.06)
Older S-Mother	.17 (.06)		.21 (.08)	.31 (.10)
Older S-Father	.21 (.07)		.21 (.07)	.26 (.09)
Older S-Younger S[a]	.31 (.08)	.42 (.10)	.50 (.12)	.29 (.09)
Younger S-Mother		.32 (.10)	.44 (.11)	
Younger S-Father	.26 (.07)	.38 (.12)	.17 (.06)	.23 (.08)
Younger S-Older S	.41 (.10)	.56 (.14)	.23 (.07)	.55 (.13)
		Acquiescence		
Family		.20 (.09)		
Actor				
Mother	.37 (.10)	.53 (.16)	.40 (.11)	.33 (.10)
Father	.30 (.11)	.39 (.16)	.43 (.12)	.29 (.11)
Older S	.31 (.10)	.46 (.16)	.24 (.09)	.61 (.17)
Younger S	.31 (.10)	.53 (.18)	.50 (.14)	.34 (.21)
Partner				
Mother				
Father				
Older S				.30 (.10)
Younger S	.12 (.06)	.26 (.11)		.29 (.10)
Relationship				
Mother-Father	.32 (.09)	.33 (.12)	.42 (.11)	.39 (.13)
Mother-Older S	.18 (.08)	. 37 (.13)	.15 (.07)	
Mother-Younger S	.14 (.07)	.37 (.14)	.32 (.10)	.49 (.15)
Father-Mother	.52 (.14)	1.13 (.29)	.44 (.12)	.97 (.25)
Father-Older S	.68 (.18)	.44 (.16)	.29 (.10)	.40 (.14)
Father-Younger S	.36 (.12)	.66 (.20)	.18 (.08)	.43 (.15)
Older S-Mother	.37 (.11)	.67 (.20)	.20 (.09)	.81 (.23)
Older S-Father	.47 (.13)	.44 (.15)	.51 (.13)	1.27 (.30)
Older S-Younger S	.55 (.15)	.37 (.14)	.60 (.15)	
Younger S-Mother	.33 (.10)	.74 (.22)	.23 (.09)	.43 (.16)
Younger S-Father	.50 (.13)	.46 (.16)	.34 (.11)	.48 (.16)
Younger S-Older S	.48 (.13)	.63 (.19)	.42 (.12)	.62 (.18)

Note. Only significant ($p < .05$) variances are reported. [a] S is sibling.

Table 4. Reciprocity Correlations from SRM for Effectance and Acquiescence

Component	Intentional-Positive	Intentional-Negative	Unintentional-Positive	Unintentional-Negative
		Effectance		
Actor-Partner				
Mother	NA	NA	NA	NA
Father	NA	NA	NA	NA
Older S[a]	.83*	NA	NA	-.07
Younger S	NA	NA	NA	NA
Relationship				
Mother-Father	.45*	.18	.49*	.21
Mother-Older S	NA	NA	NA	NA
Mother-Younger S	NA	.15	.03	NA
Father-Older S	NA	NA	-.18	.03
Father-Younger S	.21	NA	.13	.09
Older S-Younger S	.16	.11	.29	-.04
		Acquiescence		
Actor-Partner				
Mother	NA	NA	NA	NA
Father	NA	NA	NA	NA
Older S	NA	NA	NA	.11
Younger S	-.19	.54	NA	.41
Relationship				
Mother-Father	.42*	.34	.57*	.06
Mother-Older S	-.15	.35	.13	NA
Mother-Younger S	.55*	.20	.19	-.01
Father-Older S	.25	.02	.26	.19
Father-Younger S	.04	.20	.01	.08
Older S-Younger S	.49*	.13	-.01	NA

Note. Correlations in which one of the variables has no significant variance are uninterpretable and are indicated with NA. [a] S is sibling.
* $p < .05$.

Table 5. Percentages of the Explained Variance by SRM Factors for Each Scale

	Factors			
	Family	*Actor*	*Partner*	*Relationship-Error*
Effectance				
Intentional-Positive	18	48	12	22
Intentional-Negative	21	52	3	24
Unintentional-Positive	19	50	5	26
Unintentional-Negative	11	53	10	26
Acquiescence				
Intentional-Positive	8	38	13	41
Intentional-Negative	20	31	17	32
Unintentional-Positive	13	39	12	36
Unintentional-Negative	15	29	21	35

Intentional-Negative Effectance. Fit indices of the SRM to family members' scores on this scale were good: χ^2 (50, N = 50) = 56.33, p = .25; RMSEA = .05; CFI = .99. As can be seen in Table 3, no significant family variance and partner variances were found, but all actor factors and several relationship factors were significant. Family members' sense of intentional negative influence is thus affected by characteristics of the one who is influencing. Relationship factors further indicate that the parents' sense of intentional negative influence towards the older sibling is not affected by the specific relationship the parents have with the older sibling. And vice versa, the older siblings' sense of intentional negative influence towards the parents is not affected by the specific relationship with the parent. With respect to reciprocity, no significant correlations were found. Examining Table 5, the actor effects (52%) explained by far the most variance in sense of intentional negative influence. Partner effects only accounted for 3% of the variance.

Unintentional-Positive Effectance. The fit to the data was acceptable: χ^2 (49, N = 50) = 64.69, p = .07; RMSEA = .08; CFI = .97. The family and partner factors did not account for reliable variance, but all actor factors and nearly all relationship factors were significant. Only the mother-older sibling relationship factor was not significant. As for Intentional-Positive Effectance, a significant dyadic reciprocity correlation was found for the relation between mother and father. For this construct was the proportion of explained actor variance large (50%) and the proportion of explained partner variance very small (5%).

Unintentional-Negative Effectance. The fit to the data was acceptable: χ^2 (49, N = 50) = 67.78, p = .04; RMSEA = .08; CFI = .95. Again, the family factor was not significant. For this construct, a significant partner factor for the older siblings was found. This means that families vary in the extent to which the older sibling elicits from other family members a sense of having unintentional negative influence over the older sibling. In other words, characteristics of the older sibling partially explain other family members' feeling that they inadvertently influence the older sibling negatively. Every actor factor and nearly all of the relationship factors were significant, excepting the mother-older sibling relationship, the

mother-younger sibling relationship, and the younger sibling-father relationship. Mothers' sense of unintentional negative influence regarding their children is not affected by the specific mother-child relationship. The explained actor variance for this construct was large. Individual level characteristics of the family members accounted for 53% of the variance between families in family members' sense of unintentional negative influence.

Summarizing the results of the SRM analyses on data of the Effectance-scales, the following findings can be noted. The relative importance of the SRM components is very similar for the different constructs. Family members' sense of control, both intentional and unintentional, is mainly influenced by characteristics of the actor and to a lesser degree by the specific relationship. Only once the family variance was significant, for a sense of intentional positive influence in families. This means that families differ from each other regarding their family members' beliefs about their ability to intentionally do things that are positive for one another: in some families this belief is systematically higher with every family member than in other families. Two significant partner factors were observed, both for the older sibling. It is interesting to note that all intragenerational relationship factors were significant. Finally, a significant reciprocity correlation on the individual level was found for the older siblings (intentional-positive influence). Significant reciprocity on the dyadic level was only found in the spouse relationship and only regarding positive influence, for both intentional and unintentional influence.

Acquiescence

Intentional-Positive Acquiescence. The fit to the data was good: χ^2 (47, N = 50) = 50.18, p = .35; RMSEA = .04; CFI = .98. As can be seen in Table 3, the family factor was not significant. On the other hand, all actor and relationship factors were significant. A significant actor factor means that family member' sense of being intentionally positively influenced by other family members is partially dependent on the characteristics of the family member who is being influenced. Moreover, this sense of being influenced is for each family member

affected by the specific relationship in which each family member participates. A significant partner factor for the younger sibling was found: Family members' sense of being intentionally positively influenced by the younger siblings is to a certain extent affected by characteristics of the younger sibling. In other words, family members agree on whether or not the younger sibling can intentionally do things to please them. Moreover and shown in Table 4, three significant dyadic reciprocity correlations were found; for the mother-father dyad, the mother – younger sibling dyad, and the older sibling – younger sibling dyad. For this construct the explained actor (38%) and relationship (41%) variances were most important and their relative proportions were almost equal.

Intentional-Negative Acquiescence. Fit indices indicated a close fit to the data: χ^2 (46, N = 50) = 49.21, p = .35; RMSEA = .04; CFI = .98. For this construct, a significant family factor was found. This means that in some families family members feel they are more intentionally negatively influenced by other family members than in other families. All of the actor and relationship factors were significant. The partner factor for the younger sibling was also significant. In addition to intentional positive influence, younger siblings also differ across families in how much they are experienced as having intentional negative influence. Significant reciprocity correlations were not found, although the younger sibling actor-partner correlation, the mother-father relationship correlation, and the mother-older sibling relationship correlation were marginally significant. For this construct, the explained actor (31%) and relationship (17%) variances were most important.

Unintentional-Positive Acquiescence. The fit of SRM to the data was good: χ^2 (46, N = 50) = 49.91, p = .32; RMSEA = .04; CFI = .98. Significant family and partner factors were not found, but all actor factors and relationship factors were significant. A significant reciprocity correlation was found regarding the spouse relationship. For this construct, actor (39%) and relationship (36%) effects were responsible for the largest proportion of explained variance.

Unintentional-Negative Acquiescence. The fit was good: χ^2 (43, N = 50) = 44.79, p = .40; RMSEA = .03; CFI = .98. All actor factors were significant and

both partner factors of the siblings were significant. This means that both the older siblings and the younger siblings vary across families in the extent to which other family members experience them as having unintentionally negative influence. Almost all of the relationship factors were significant. Reciprocity correlations on the individual and dyadic level were not found. The proportion of variance explained by unique relationships (35%) was the largest for this construct, although partner variance (21%) was relatively more important than for some other constructs.

In sum, family members' sense of being controlled, both intentional and unintentional, is mainly affected by characteristics of the actor and the actor's unique relationship with the partner. The variance explained by actor and relationship effects is almost equally large for each construct. One significant family factor was found for intentional-negative influence. Four partner factors were significant, each time regarding the children and not the parents. The amount variance explained by partner effects was highest for the sense of negative Acquiescence. This finding generalized across both intentional and unintentional influence. Four significant reciprocity correlations were found, all at the dyadic level, and two of which involved the spouse relationship.

To conclude the description of the results, it should be mentioned that intragenerational similarities were never found.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was twofold. The first aim was to investigate whether family members have a sense of intentional influence and a sense of unintentional influence and differentiate between both senses. The second aim was to examine whether sense of intentional influence and sense of unintentional influence are constructed by the same or different SRM factors.

With respect to our first aim, results of the MANOVA indicated that family members do have a sense of intentional and a sense of unintentional influence and differentiate between both senses. These results support the embryonic evidence from the pilot study and from our phenomenological research (De Mol & Buysse,

2007) that a sense of unintentional influence exists and that people differentiate between sense of intentional and sense of unintentional influence. The analyses of variance further revealed that family members reported a higher sense of intentional influence (and being intentionally influenced) than a sense of unintentional influence (and being unintentionally influenced). Family members realize influence more when effects of influence are linked with intentionality, reflecting the common way interpersonal influence is understood and felt in Western society and culture (Eldering, 2006). Probably people recognize a sense of unintentional influence, but maybe this topic is too new or too unusual to hold strong views about it. This issue needs further research.

In the parent-child and spouse relationships family members reported a higher sense of influence for positive effects in comparison with negative outcomes. Apparently in these family relationships family members realize more they can please someone than they can hurt another person. Maybe a sense that one can distress or hurt another family member is too threatening for parent-child and spouse relationships. Such perspective runs counter to social constructions about sound family relationships (Gergen, 1994). Moreover, in the parent-child and spouse relationships differences between intentional and unintentional influence were especially pronounced for positive valence. The strong senses of intentional but positive influence reflect this positive engagement and commitment in the parent-child and spouse relationships.

In the sibling relationship higher sense of intentional influence was reported but the valence of effect was of minor importance. Presumably in the horizontal sibling relationship influence is more exclusively equated with power or control (intentional influence). The sense that one has intentional effects is most significant, not the valence of one's outcome for the other sibling. The differentiation between sense of intentional and unintentional negative influence is only present in the sibling relationship: siblings reported higher sense of intentional negative towards each other compared to sense of unintentional negative influence. Apparently the sibling relationship is healthy enough, controversially expressed, to sustain this sense of intentional negative influence.

The second aim of this study was to investigate whether sense of intentional and unintentional influence, and being influenced, are affected by the same or different interpersonal factors. This was a first demonstration study concerning sense of control in family systems using SRM in which intentionality and valence of effect were systematically manipulated. Modest differences in amounts of explained variance of the different SRM components were only observed between sense of influence (Effectance-scales) and sense of being influenced (Acquiescence-scales). No major differences were observed between the various senses of influence (intentional/unintentional and positive/negative), and between the various senses of being influenced (intentional/unintentional and positive/negative). Senses of influence are mainly dependent on characteristics of the actor and to a certain extent on relationship factors. Senses of being influenced are mainly dependent on actor and relationship factors, although partner factors are somewhat more important in comparison with sense of influence. Because the various senses of influence and senses of being influenced are constructed by the same factors, respectively, the significance of the SRM components across the different constructs is systematically discussed.

Family factors account for some variance in family members' reports on interpersonal influence. A family effect reflects the culture of the family, the way family members associate with one another, and indicates shared views and beliefs constructed by the family members (Reiss, 1981). From a systemic perspective on family dynamics a significant family factor specifies the importance of family culture regarding family members' individual and relational life in the family. Significant yet small family variance was found for Intentional-Positive Effectance and for Intentional-Negative Acquiescence. Concerning Intentional-Positive Effectance, a similar modest family factor was found in a study concerning quality of attachment in families using SRM (Buist, Deković, Meeus, & van Aken, 2004). Probably certain characteristics of family culture are important to enhance positive relationship quality between family members, supposing that quality of attachment and sense of intentional positive influence are associated with relationship quality. However, SRM analysis does not provide information about characteristics of

family culture that would make a difference. This is a question for future research. In addition, a significant family factor was found for family members' sense of intentional negative influence by other family members. Apparently, this feeling of being intentionally negatively influenced by another family member is partially dependent on certain characteristics of family culture. This means that family members' personal sense of being negatively influenced can be altered by interventions that focus on the family level. From a systemic view on family members' personal development, this is a promising perspective. Again, future research can investigate which family characteristics matter.

Actor factors are important in each construct, although actor variance was relatively larger for sense of influence than for sense of being influenced. All of the actor factors in every scale were significant. These findings are similar to several other SRM family studies regarding attachment (Buist et al., 2004; Cook, 2000), restrictiveness (van Aken, Oud, Mathijsen, & Koot, 2001), and negativity (Cook, Kenny, & Goldstein, 1991). However, our findings differ from the results of Cook's sense of control study (Cook, 1993). Cook found more actor variance for sense of being controlled than for sense of control (in fact only the actor factor of the mother was significant for sense of control). Overall, actor variances were smaller in Cook's study than in our study. What are possible explanations for the larger amounts of actor variance in our study? First, probably our measures (as the measures used in other SRM studies resulting in much actor variance, e.g., the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment used in the Buist et al. study) trigger more personality dimensions like emotions (e.g., hurt feelings, pleasure, embarrassment) and motivational components (intentionality). Second, in Cook's study the construction of the items reduces the degree to which cross-relational consistency can be found, which is the basis for the actor component (W.L. Cook, personal communication, October 29, 2004). In several items of Cook's questionnaires sense of control in the targeted relationship is compared to the person's sense of control in other family relationships. Forcing the participants to compare their sense of control in various relationships generates in all probability relational variability in persons' sense of control.

In our study, actor variances were especially large for mothers' and fathers' sense of intentional negative influence. In addition, actor variances were largest for Intentional-Negative Effectance, Unintentional-Positive Effectance, and Unintentional-Negative Effectance. The very large actor variances of mothers and fathers for Intentional-Negative Effectance are probably the result of two things. First, mothers' (and the same goes for fathers) ratings are similar for the three relationships. In other words, mothers (and fathers) show little within-family response variance. Second, there is much between-family variance. Some mothers (and fathers) reported much higher sense of intentional negative influence than other mothers (and fathers). Presumably parents differ to a large extent with respect to their reports about their intentional negative influence over other family members. Some parents recognize having such experiences in their family relationships, while for other parents this is much more difficult.

In general, personal characteristics of family members are important to determine their sense of intentional as well unintentional influence, for Effectance and for Acquiescence. The question is why actor factors are most important for family members' sense of intentional and unintentional influence (and being influenced). One could assume for example that partner factors would be more significant for sense of unintentional influence, as a certain family member could elicit a sense from the other family members that whatever they do, they have that specific effect on that family member. Most likely one important reason is the methodology used in this study. Self-report measures are explicit measures: participants are explicitly asked about their sense of influence in daily family interactions and family relationships. It seems logical that addressing person's intentionality triggers personality characteristics. Moreover, we suggest that making explicit inquiries about the unusual subject of unintentional influence forces the participants to introspection, including a smaller orientation towards the relationship partner. Hence, the methodology of self-reports is probably a serious limitation of the present study. Future research should focus on different methodological approaches, like for example observational methods combined with on-line introspection (Ickes et al., 2000), to validate or falsify these results.

Partner factors were far less important than actor factors in both sense of influence and sense of being influenced. This finding in is line with other family SRM studies (Buist et al., 2004; Cook, 2000; Cook et al., 1991; van Aken et al., 2001), but in contrast with Cook's study of sense of control (Cook, 1993). What are possible explanations for the larger amounts of partner variance in Cook's study? Cook's questionnaires focus on control and manipulation. Consequently, the effects of one's influence can be better-defined. In contrast to intentional or unintentional effects of person's influence, there exists language in our Western socio-cultural discourse to talk about control in families (Kuczynski, Lollis, & Koguchi, 2003). One can imagine conversations between siblings (maybe even in the presence of the parents) how to deal with father in order to obtain something. This means that the partner effect of the father is created in the ongoing dialogue and interactions between family members, in which also the father participates. We suggest that a partner effect is a narrative constructed in a family concerning a family member, and these constructions can even be present at an implicit level (Fiese & Spagnola, 2005). When language is lacking about interpersonal influence phenomena, such as language about the complex connection between intentionality and effects of influence, partner effects can be scarcely constructed.

In our study, significant partner variance was only found for the siblings. Moreover, partner variances were relatively larger for Acquiescence than for Effectance. What are possible explanations for these findings? Probably children, and more specifically adolescents, are the most perspicuous sources of influence in the family regarding the kind of interpersonal influence investigated in this study. As adolescents are involved in the process to establish their own agency in family relationships (Beyers, Goossens, Vansant, & Moors, 2003; Collins & Steinberg, 2006), their relational behavior becomes more explicit. Consequently, effects of an adolescent's behavior can become more pronounced (pleasant or unpleasant) and obviously similar for the family members. For example, the younger siblings' partner factor was significant for sense of being negatively influenced, both intentionally and unintentionally. Presumably there is some agreement in families about the negative influence the younger sibling have on the other family members.

Maybe the way they are gaining autonomy is experienced as highly unpleasant in some families, while in other families this is not such a problem. The older siblings' partner factor was, for instance, significant for sense of intentional positive and unintentional negative influence. This indicates that as a target of these kinds of influence the older siblings become more transparent.

Relationship variance was not partitioned from error. This is another limitation of the present study. Consequently, results concerning relationship factors should be viewed very cautiously. Relationship factors are important in each construct, although the proportion of explained relationship variance was larger for Acquiescence than for Effectance. Assuming that a major portion of the variance was not due to errors of measurement, this means that the specific relationship is more important for family members' sense of being influenced than for family members' sense of influence. Almost all relationship factors were significant for Acquiescence, and only a few were not significant for Effectance. Incidence of significant relationship factors indicates interdependence for sense of influence and sense of being influenced, because in order to get significant relationship variance the actor has to make a unique adjustment to the partner. Especially, referring to sense of being influenced, family members feel others' influence as significantly dependent on the specific relationship they have with that specific family member. This is especially true for the sense of being negatively influence, intentionally and unintentionally, in the father-mother relationship. Cook also found significant relationship variance in the spouse relationship in a study concerning negativity in family relationships (Cook et al., 1991). Fathers have a relationally unique experience of the negative influence they receive from their wives. Possibly the classical male withdrawal response during conflict in spouse relationships (Heavey, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995; Verhofstadt, Buysse, De Clercq, & Goodwin, 2005) is associated with this sense of being influenced of fathers.

Significant reciprocity correlations were found on the individual level and on the dyadic level. Reciprocity in this study about 'sense' can not be interpreted as mutuality because senses are not reciprocated. We suggest interpreting reciprocity

of senses as the establishment of a balance between family members. This balance is established during the many interactions of the family members that construct their relationships (Hinde, 1997). During these interactions reciprocity of behaviors occurs and this reciprocity mediates the establishment of a balance between the family members. On the individual level a significant positive correlation was found for the older siblings concerning sense of intentional positive influence. A similar result was found in the attachment study (Buist et al., 2004). Again, it indicates the special position of the older sibling in family dynamics. Several significant reciprocity correlations were found on the dyadic level, for Effectance and Acquiescence. A remarkable finding is that positive influence, in each construct, is reciprocated between the spouses, indicating the unique character of the marital relationship in families. Again, this finding is in line with the attachment study (Buist et al., 2004). Moreover, reciprocity of sense of intentional-positive Acquiescence was found in the relationships between mother and the younger sibling, and the older sibling and the younger sibling. Sense of Acquiescence can be interpreted that the family member who is being influenced is motivated to 'give' influence to the other family member (Cook, 1993). This means that the more mother allows intentional positive influence from the younger sibling, the more the sibling allows intentional positive influence from the mother. The same goes for the sibling and spouse relationship.

In summary, elaborating on Cook's study of sense of control in family relations (Cook, 1993), several constructs of interpersonal influence were investigated using SRM. Results indicated that family members' sense of influence is mainly dependent on characteristics of the actor and to a certain degree on relationship characteristics, and family members' sense of being influenced is primarily determined by both relationship and actor characteristics. The major finding is that family members' sense of intentional and unintentional influence (and being influenced) are affected by the same SRM factors. Several limitations of the present study were indicated, in particular regarding methodological issues. In addition, another key problem of our questionnaires might concern the highly flexible and too liberal use of the notions influence and (un)intentionality. There is

some evidence for the existence of a sense of unintentional influence. But possibly the notion of unintentional influence is too unusual and too new, so participants might find it very difficult to associate unintentional influence with real relational experiences in their families. Probably the use of prompts or hypothetical scenarios about concrete issues (e.g., food and eating habits in families) can help family members to reflect on differences between intentional and unintentional influence. On the whole, future research should concentrate on the search for appropriate measures, because, as Huston (2002) stated, the distinction between intentional and unintentional influence can be advantageous to disclose complexities of human processes of interpersonal influence.

PART 2: INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE IN FAMILY SYSTEMS: MULTIPLE-PERSPECTIVE ANALYSIS AND SOCIAL RELATIONS MODEL ANALYSIS

The present study aims at investigating interpersonal influence, both intentional and unintentional, in family systems. Because this study is a continuation of the study described in Part 1, there is a substantial overlap between both studies for theoretical background, participants and procedure, and design and measures. Overlap will be indicated with 'see Part 1' or there will be referred to Part 1. The major difference between both studies is that the study of chapter 3 focused on *sense* of influence, while the aim of this study is to objectify interpersonal influence in family systems. SRM analysis on sense of influence indicated that similar SRM factors affected both sense of intentional and sense of unintentional influence in family relationships. This study addresses the question whether similar or different SRM factors affect objectified intentional and unintentional influence in family systems.

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal influence has been studied in parent-child relations (Kuczynski, 2003; Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997), and in family relations (Cook, 2001). An important topic concerns possible sources of interpersonal influence in family systems (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). The central question is: who is driving the interaction or relationship? In this connection, three models of interpersonal influence have been described by Sameroff (1975). First, the main effects model states that relationship outcomes are due to characteristics of a specific family member, i.e., characteristics of the parent or characteristics of the child. Second, the interactional model focuses on the fit between family members and assumes that relationship outcomes result from the goodness-of-fit between characteristics of family members. Third, the transactional model locates the source of interpersonal influence in the mutual and reciprocal adaptation between family members. These three models of interpersonal influence are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary, they can be considered as complementary (Cook, 2001). Moreover, the relative importance of the various sources of interpersonal influence can be simultaneously investigated using the Social Relations Model (SRM; Kenny & LaVoie, 1984). The family version of the SRM has been described in Part 1. Referring to the models of interpersonal influence described by Sameroff, actor and partner factors correspond to the main effects model, relationship factors regard the interactional model, and reciprocity correlations refer to the transactional model.

The present study elaborates on Cook's study concerning interpersonal influence in family systems, using a round-robin design in order to perform SRM (Cook, 2001). The aim of Cook's study was twofold. The first purpose was to obtain nonsubjective measures, free of the subjective bias of family members, of interpersonal influence in family relations. This goal was achieved using multiple-perspectives analysis on the individual reports of family members regarding specific relationships. Consequently, when family members had a shared perspective of interpersonal influence in a specific relationship, a latent variable could be created representing a nonsubjective view of interpersonal influence in that relationship. Second, SRM analysis was performed on the latent variable

measures of interpersonal influence to answer the question regarding the relative importance of the various sources of interpersonal influence in family relations.

Cook's (2001) study exclusively focused on intentional influence. In this study we focus on intentional and unintentional influence, and on the valence (positive or negative) of the effects of influence (see Part 1). Because the aim of this study was to perform SRM analysis on nonsubjective measures of interpersonal influence in family relationships, and consistent with Cook's methodological design, the purpose was to do two sorts of analysis: first multiple-perspective analysis to create latent factors of interpersonal influence in family relations, and subsequently SRM analysis on the latent variable measures. Following questions were addressed: (1) Is it possible to create latent variables regarding intentional (positive/negative) and unintentional (positive/negative) influence in family systems? (2) Are intentional and unintentional influence constructed by the same or different SRM factors?

METHOD

Participants and procedure

See Part 1.

Design and Measures

In order to perform multiple-perspectives analysis, three measures were developed. First, family members had to report on how much they believe they have an influence on another family member (Effectance). Second, family members had to report on how much they believe they are being influenced by another family member (Acquiescence). Third, family members had to report on how much they perceive other family members influencing another family member (Other-Effectance). Consequently, four reports were obtained for each relationship. For example, for the mother-father relationship: mother reported on her sense of influence in the relation to father (Effectance), father reported on his sense of being influenced by mother (Acquiescence), and the two adolescents reported each on

how they perceived the influence from mother on father (two times Other-Effectance).

To perform SRM analysis, a round-robin design was used, in which every family member had to rate all of his/her family relationships. In combination with the multiple-perspectives analysis, this means that every family member had to rate (a) sense of influence (Effectance) in his/her three family relationships, (b) sense of being influenced (Acquiescence) in his/her three family relationships, and (c) influence in the six family relationships for which he/she is observer. In addition, one scale for each cell (construct) of our 2 (intentionality: intentional vs. unintentional) x 2 (valence: positive vs. negative) manipulation was developed, and this for Effectance, Acquiescence, and Other-Effectance. Each scale consisted of three items (see Part 1). For the items of the Other-Effectance-scales, the names of the actor and partner were systematically changed according to the family members of the specific relationship that had to be rated. For example, the first item of the scale 'Intentionality and positive valence' was changed into: If *mother* wants, it happens that *she* does things that *father* finds nice.

In sum, each family member had to rate four Effectance-scales for each of his/her three family relationships, four Acquiescence-scales for each of his/her three family relationships, and four Other-Effectance-scales of each of the six family relationships for which he/she is observer.

Missing data

See Part 1.

RESULTS

Reliability

For reliabilities (Cronbach's α) of the three-item Effectance-scales and Acquiescence-scales across the 12 relationships, see Part 1. Average α coefficients for the Other-Effectance-scales for Intentional-Positive, Intentional-Negative, Unintentional-Positive, and Unintentional-Negative, respectively, across the six relationships were for the mothers .75, .70, .80, and .82, for the fathers, .70, .73,

.76, and .81, for the older siblings .64, .74, .72, and .84, and for the younger siblings .72, .74, .73, and .76.

Multiple-perspective analysis

For each cell (construct) of our manipulation, six multiple-perspective, latent variable models were tested by means of confirmatory factor analysis (Cook & Goldstein, 1993). That is, each model contained two latent variables, each representing one direction of influence in a specific dyad (e.g., mother's influence on the older sibling and vice versa). The extent to which family members shared a similar perspective regarding influence in a specific relationship was evaluated by the significance of the factor loadings of the four reports (one report per family member) on the latent factor (variances of the latent variables were fixed at 1.00 and factor loadings were free to be estimated). Because each family member had two ratings in each model, one rating for each latent variable, shared method variance was measured by correlating the two rater error terms. Discriminant validity of the two constructs was tested by correlating the two latent variables. A non significant correlation indicated that the latent variables were measuring a different construct.

Results of the multiple-perspective analyses indicated that family members do not have shared perspectives of interpersonal influence in family relations. Although all models had a good fit to the data (chi-square non significant, $p > .05$, Comparative Fit Index > .95, and Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation < .08), in no model all factor loadings were significant and correlations between the latent factors non significant. Both conditions were only met in following relationships: for Intentional-Negative the father- younger sibling and father-older sibling relationship, for Unintentional-Positive the father-older sibling relationship, and for Unintentional-Negative the mother- younger sibling and father-younger sibling relationship.

Mean levels

Because multiple-perspective analysis did not yield nonsubjective measures of interpersonal influence in family relations, and consequently SRM analysis on latent variable measures could not be performed, a different approach was chosen. The aim of this new approach was not to provide answers regarding the failure of the multiple-perspective analysis, yet to compare perceptions of interpersonal influence regarding a certain group of family members (i.e., mothers, fathers, older adolescents, and younger adolescents). The latter is interesting since shared perspectives among family members were not found. More specifically, the purpose was to compare, for example for the group mothers (a) the perception of the mothers about their influence in family relations (Effectance), with (b) the perception of how the other family members felt being influenced by the mothers (Acquiescence), and with (c) the perception of family members about mothers' influence in family relationships in which the rater did not participate but was observer (Other-Effectance). Means of Effectance, Acquiescence, and Other-Effectance for the sample of the mothers, fathers, older siblings, and younger siblings, respectively, and for each construct were compared using planned comparisons. Means of Effectance and Acquiescence were calculated for the aggregated scores across three relationships in which a family member participated. Means of Other-Effectance were calculated for the six relationships in which a family member was observed by the other family members. Results are shown in Table 6.

Mothers' mean Effectance scores for Intentional-Positive were significantly higher than both mothers' Acquiescence scores and Other-Effectance scores. Mothers seem to overestimate their intentional-positive influence in family relationships in comparison with the way other family members feel and observe this influence of mothers. On the other hand, mothers underestimate their negative (intentional and unintentional) influence. Moreover, the way mothers' unintentional-negative influence is experienced by family members in their relationship with mother (Acquiescence) is significantly higher

Table 6. Comparisons between Means of Effectance, Acquiescence, and Other-Effectance

	Effectance	Acquiescence	Other-Effectance	*Significant contrasts*
	M	*M*	*M*	
Mother				
IP	6.00	5.65	5.70	E > A, E > O
IN	3.36	3.93	3.97	E < A, E < O
UP	4.76	4.73	4.80	
UN	3.39	3.89	3.72	E < A, A > O
Father				
IP	5.51	5.48	5.57	
IN	3.86	3.97	3.88	A > O
UP	4.46	4.66	4.73	
UN	3.74	3.83	3.71	
Older sibling				
IP	5.41	5.36	5.32	
IN	4.25	3.99	4.05	
UP	4.42	4.86	4.70	E < A, A > O
UN	3.92	3.77	3.80	
Younger sibling				
IP	5.25	5.53	5.55	E < O
IN	4.14	4.30	4.18	A > O
UP	4.33	4.87	4.90	E < A, E < O
UN	3.99	3.90	3.89	

Note. IP is Intentional-Positive, IN is Intentional-Negative, UP is Unintentional-Positive, UN is Unintentional-Negative. E is Effectance, A is Acquiescence, O is Other-Effectance.
The significance of the contrasts was evaluated using a Bonferroni correction with the criterion set at $p < .017$.

than the way mothers' unintentional-negative influence is observed in family relationships (Other-Effectance). For both older and younger siblings a different pattern was found. Both adolescents seem to underestimate their unintentional-positive influence. Furthermore, the younger adolescents underestimate their intentional-positive influence, but only regarding the way this positive influence is observed in family relationships. For the fathers, the only significant difference was found regarding Acquiescence and Other-Effectance for Intentional-Negative. No differences were found regarding fathers' Effectance, implying that fathers in general seem to report about their influence in a similar way as other family members in general experience or observe fathers' influence.

DISCUSSION

The present study attempted to investigate sources of objectified interpersonal influence in family systems by manipulating the factors intentionality and valence of effects. Confirmatory factor analyses did not yield latent variables of interpersonal influence in order to perform SRM analysis. Consequently SRM analyses could not be done and research questions could not be answered. Because this study elaborated on Cook's study of interpersonal influence in family systems (Cook, 2001), and Cook did find latent factors using multiple-perspective analysis, questions remain why our study failed.

First, a limitation of our study is the sample size. A sample of 50 families is considered as sufficient to perform SRM analysis (Kashy & Kenny, 1990) but proved in this case to be insufficient for multiple-perspective analysis (Bartle-Haring, Kenny, & Gavazzi, 1999). Second, several other studies revealed a lack of agreement between perspectives of insiders and outsiders (Cook & Goldstein, 1993). Although outsiders in these studies were usually trained independent observers and not family members (in our study family members completed the Other-Effectance scales), these studies demonstrated the difficulty to establish agreement among raters. Third, family members actually do not share similar perspectives of interpersonal influence in family relationships, more specifically regarding interpersonal influence the way it was operationalized in this study. Consequently, the question remains why Cook (2001) did find shared perspectives the way he operationalized interpersonal influence.

Cook measured interpersonal influence as power or control (Huston, 2002). Family members were asked about their ability to strategically initiate action regarding a specific family member in order to persuade or convince that family member. Consequently, in Cook's study the construct interpersonal influence was conceptualized as family members' ability to realize one's own wishes or goals in family interactions and relationships, i.e., influence as power and control. Because interpersonal influence is usually conceptualized in this way, there exists in our Western socio-cultural discourse language to talk about control and power (Kuczynski, Lollis, & Koguchi, 2003). As a consequence, power and

control in family relationships are perceptible for family members. Probably this is one reason why Cook found shared perspectives of power and control in family relations. In our study, on the other hand, interpersonal influence was conceptualized in a more unusual way. In the first place, it seems difficult for people to think about their own and especially others' unintentional influence, as influence is mostly linked with intentionality. Second, family members were forced to look at the effects of their own and others' influence. While in Cook's study the focus was on the realization of one's own goals in the relationship, in our study family members had to shift their position and focus on the meaning of one's influence for a specific other family member. Presumably there are no shared perspectives among family members about the meaning of the effect of a family member's influence regarding another family member, because people are not used to think about influence in terms of effects and consequently language is lacking about these influence phenomena.

With respect to the comparisons between general scores on Effectance, Acquiescence, and Other-Effectance, especially the result that both younger and older adolescents underestimate their unintentional-positive influence in family relationships looks interesting. More specifically, the significant difference between Effectance and Acquiescence means that the way adolescents are experienced by other family members (in the actual relationship with the adolescents), is more positive than adolescents themselves assess. However, the difference regards unintentional influence. By disentangling intentional and unintentional influence, room is made in families to assess positive influence of adolescents in family relationships. A hypothesis is that if interpersonal influence would be only conceptualized as intentional influence, it would be more difficult to assess adolescents' positive influence in family relationships, because in adolescence commitment to family relationships is less pronounced as other relationships, like peer relationships, become more important. In other words, the "intentional" commitment and engagement towards family relationships decreases in adolescence, but the "unintentional" connectedness remains. However, because

it regards unintentional influence, language is lacking and a sense of this positive influence is absent for the adolescents themselves.

In sum, this study failed to objectify intentional and unintentional interpersonal influence in family relationships. A central hypothesis is that the methodological way interpersonal influence was investigated in this study (self-reports) constrains objectification because language is lacking in our culture about these interpersonal influence phenomena.

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CHAPTER 5

Systemic Hypotheses of a Clinical Family: A Social Relations Model Analysis[4]

One purpose of family assessment is to formulate hypotheses that can guide psychotherapeutic interventions. Family assessment is based on models about systemic functioning. In this paper the Social Relations Model (Kenny & La Voie, 1984; SRM) is presented as such a model about family functioning. Moreover, SRM provides statistical tools to underpin empirically systemic hypotheses. A SRM family assessment of a family with a child in child psychiatric care exemplifies the possibilities and limitations of this SRM approach to family assessment. The subject of the family assessment is family members' sense of influence in their family relationships.

[4] De Mol, J., & Buysse, A. (2007). Systemic hypotheses of a clinical family: A social relations model analysis. Manuscript submitted for publication.

INTRODUCTION

A systemic perspective on family dynamics takes into account the multiple levels of the family system − the personality of each family member, the relationships between the various family members, and the family as a whole − and their complex interplay. The Social Relations Model (Kenny & La Voie, 1984; SRM) is designed to elucidate the relative importance of each level of the family system to the family members' behaviour, feelings, and cognitions in their family relationships. SRM reflects a way of thinking about systemic functioning. Moreover, SRM provides statistical tools to investigate this way of thinking on family dynamics. Consequently, SRM is well positioned to underpin empirically systemic hypotheses. This paper reports on an SRM family assessment of a family with a child that is hospitalized in a child psychiatric centre. The main purpose of this paper is to present how SRM hypotheses can guide psychotherapeutic interventions, in addition to the many other sources of information and hypotheses that guide the family therapist. The subject of the family assessment is the family members' sense of influence in their family relationships. Interpersonal sense of influence is proposed as a valuable concept for family assessment from a systemic perspective (Cook, 1993).

SENSE OF INTENTIONAL AND UNINTENTIONAL INFLUENCE

A basic assumption of family therapy is that family members influence each other. Interpersonal influence is the process by which family members affect and change each other's thoughts, behaviour and emotions (Huston, 2002). Influence can be intentional or unintentional (Huston, 2002). Intentional influence refers to the process by which someone intentionally generates action to change

someone else's thoughts, behaviour or emotions in order to obtain particular effects. In contrast, unintentional influence is the process by which people affect one another without particular goal-directed intentions. The process of unintentional influence can be understood as a consequence of Watzlawick's first axiom of interpersonal communication: "one cannot not communicate" (Watzlawick, Jackson, & Beavin, 1967). A corollary of this axiom, at least within close relationships, is that one cannot not influence (Griffin, 2006). When there is interdependence, processes of influence are inevitable; that is, family members influence each other continuously, both intentionally and unintentionally.

Family members have to develop a sense of making a difference (Bateson, 1979) in their family relationships, for their own personal development and for the development of the family as a system (Street, 1994). A sense of making a difference means that family members feel that their being in the relationship is meaningful for the other family member. This 'being in the relationship' may reflect intentional and unintentional influence over the other family member. In the literature so far, sense of influence is often equated with intentional influence, as it regards sense of control (Cook, 1993). Sense of control reflects people's beliefs about their ability to persuade or convince one another, or their ability to act strategically to obtain desired goals. However, consistent with Huston's (2002) distinction between intentional and unintentional influence, sense of influence could also refer to people's beliefs about their ability to unintentionally influence outcomes (e.g., "I can do things that are unpleasant for the other, without intending to be unpleasant, but still the things are unpleasant for the other").

In our own research on the phenomenology of children's influence on their parents, both the children and the parents viewed

children's influence as mainly unintentional (De Mol & Buysse, 2007). Children postulated having a sense of this unintentional influence on their parents as existential for their personal development and relation with their parents. In their narratives, children clearly distinguish influence from control or power. Influence on the parents is much broader than power or getting parents to do something by using certain strategies. Children mainly derive a sense of influence from the responsiveness of their parents and not from the accomplishment of certain goals in the parent-child relationship. The parents described the enormous impact of their children's unintentional influence on them and reported having this sense of being influenced by their children as fundamental to the development of the parent-child relationship. In exploring processes of child-to-parent influence, family members emphasize the dimension of unintentional influence. Assuming that unintentional influence touches an essential dimension of family relationships, we can hypothesize that in families with problems the family members have less sense of unintentional influence. In these families, influence would be more exclusively felt as power (control) or intentional influence.

SOCIAL RELATIONS MODEL AND SENSE OF INFLUENCE

From a systemic perspective, a person's sense of influence in a specific family relationship − for example, a mother's sense of influence regarding her youngest child − can be dependent on a number of factors: the mother's personality, the personality of the youngest child, the specific mother-child relationship, and family factors. The family version of the SRM (Cook, 2000; Kashy & Kenny, 1990) provides a means of testing the relative significance of these factors. First, Person X's sense of influence regarding Person Y can be

dependent on how Person X perceives his/her abilities to influence all family members, independent of the specific relationship. This factor reflects a cross-relational consistency in the beliefs of Person X, much like a personality trait. In the SRM, this is called an actor effect. Second, Person X's sense of influence regarding Person Y can be dependent on the degree to which Person Y is experienced as influenceable by all his/her family members. This factor also reflects a cross-relational consistency, but in this case a consistency in how other people view Person Y. In the SRM, this is called a partner effect. Third, Person X's sense of influence regarding Person Y can be dependent on the unique sense of influence Person X has regarding person Y; that is, it does not reflect more general characteristics of either Person X or Person Y. In the SRM, this is called a relationship effect. Relationship effects are directional: the relationship effect from Person X to Person Y differs from the relationship effect from Person Y to Person X. Thus, in a four-member family, there are 12 relationship effects. Fourth, Person X's sense of control regarding Person Y can be dependent on the culture of the family or the family effect. Family effects measure similarity among the members of the family system.

Bidirectional theories of parent-child and family relations emphasize the role of reciprocity in the development of relationships (Kochanska, 1997; Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997). The SRM offers the opportunity to measure reciprocity (Cook, 2001) at both the individual and the dyadic levels. At the individual level, reciprocity is measured by correlating the actor and the partner effect of the same individual. For example, a significant positive reciprocity correlation for mothers means that, the greater the mother's sense of influence in her family relationships, the greater the family members' sense of influence in relation to the mother. At the dyadic level, reciprocity is measured by

correlating the relationship effects of the two persons composing a dyad. For example, a significant positive reciprocity correlation for the father-child dyad means that, the greater the father's unique sense of influence in relation to the child, the greater the child's sense of influence in relation to the father. Although not part of the standard or basic model, the SRM also provides tests for intra-generational similarities among family members (Cook, 2000; Kashy & Kenny, 1990). Intra-generational similarity can be measured by correlating the actor effects of family members of the same generation (e.g., the correlation of the actor effects of the mothers with the actor effects of the fathers) or by correlating the partner effects of family members of the same generation (e.g., the correlation of the partner effects of the older children with the partner effects of the younger children). A significant positive correlation of the parents' actor effects would indicate that a greater sense of influence for the mothers goes together with a greater sense of influence for the fathers. On the other hand, a significant positive correlation of the children's partner effects would indicate that, the more the older sibling affords other family members a sense of influence, the more the younger sibling does too.

SOCIAL RELATIONS MODEL AND FAMILY ASSESSMENT

The purpose of SRM family assessment is to isolate and measure the different SRM effects that affect family members' interpersonal relationships (Cook, 2005). For a two-parent two-child family, there are 4 actor effects, 4 partner effects, 12 relationship effects and 1 family effect. The SRM effects of a single family are calculated using the appropriate SRM formulas (Cook & Kenny, 2004). In order to be useful clinically, the SRM effects of the single family must be compared to the same SRM factors from a normative sample to obtain Z scores. A Z score, plus or minus 2, indicates that

the particular SRM effect of the single family is extreme (i.e., 2 standard deviations above or below the sample mean) (Cook, 2005). For example, if the mother's actor effect has a Z score of plus 2 or more, this means that the mother experiences a large sense of influence in her family relationships. Or, if the father-older sibling relationship effect has a Z score of minus 2 or lower, this means that the father experiences little sense of influence in his relationship to the older sibling. Z scores should be interpreted only for SRM factors with significant variance in the normative sample (Cook & Kenny, 2004). Reciprocity correlations cannot be calculated for a single family. However, if the actor and partner effects of a certain member of the single family are significant (Z scores plus or minus 2), reciprocity at the individual level can be hypothesized only when the corresponding reciprocity correlation in the normative sample is significant (Cook & Kenny, 2004). The same goes for reciprocity at the dyadic level.

CLINICAL ILLUSTRATION

Introduction of the clinical family

This family consists of: a 40-year-old mother, a 55-year-old stepfather, a daughter who is 16, and a daughter (15 years old) who has been hospitalized for the past year in a child psychiatric centre. The parents have been living together for the past five years. The stepfather has been divorced for 10 years and has adult children from his marriage. The mother is a housekeeper; the stepfather is a retired policeman. Both daughters attend a school for technical and vocational training. Before she was hospitalized, the younger daughter was in psychotherapeutic treatment for almost two years.

The younger daughter was hospitalized because of severe aggressive behaviour towards the other family members and outside

the home. The child psychiatric diagnosis is Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). The younger daughter says that she would like the other family members to love her, but that she is always the target of negative criticism, and that is the reason she gets so angry all the time. The mother describes the relationship between her daughters as highly discordant. The mother says she tries to intervene in the conflicts between her daughters, and that she always invests affectively in her family relations, but gets nothing in return. The mother does not feel sufficiently supported by the stepfather for her commitment to the family. The mother's life history includes sexual abuse, repudiation by her parents, and hospitalization. The stepfather says he tries to mediate in the conflicts by staying neutral. The older daughter is very angry at the younger daughter because her younger sister spoils the atmosphere in the family. In the older sibling's opinion, her younger sister is mentally disturbed, and the reason she (the older sibling) is not motivated to participate in family therapy is because her younger sister is the problem.

According to the family therapist, this is an enmeshed family. The mother's dedication to her family is immense. She tries to be an excellent mother by controlling her children excessively and involving herself in each conflict between the children. As a consequence, the mother's relationship with her adolescent daughters is constantly discordant and characterized by a process of attraction and rejection. The stepfather tries to be the saviour of the family and is indeed the "glue" between the family members for the moment. However, this solution is also a problem in the system, because the stepfather is always solving the problems between the other family members. The central issue for both daughters is: how to remain connected to the family while simultaneously developing one's own identity. The family therapist has additional hypotheses regarding the social

representations of "stepfamilies and their family relationships", "sexual abuse and neglect in one's life history", and how these social representations interpenetrate the narratives of the family and the family members. For our purpose, these hypotheses are less important.

Measures and the normative sample

Several scales were developed for sense of intentional and unintentional influence in family relationships and administered from a normative sample (De Mol & Buysse, 2007). Because SRM demands the use of equivalent measures for each relationship, scales were developed that could be applied to each relationship. In addition to the intentionality factor, the valence of the outcome or effects of one's influence was manipulated in the scales. Basically, an effect can have a positive or negative valence. On the one hand, a family member can have a sense of having positive effects regarding another family member, reflecting the family member's belief about his/her ability to do things that the other family member likes. On the other hand, a family member can have a sense of having negative effects on another family member, reflecting the family member's belief about his/her ability to do things that the other family member doesn't like. In addition, both sense of influence and sense of being influenced were measured.

In sum, eight scales were developed for each construct of the 2 (intentionality: intentional vs. unintentional) x 2 (valence: positive vs. negative) x 2 (influence vs. being influenced) manipulation: sense of intentional influence with positive effect; sense of intentional influence with negative effect; sense of unintentional influence with positive effect; sense of unintentional influence with negative effect; sense of being intentionally influenced with positive effect; sense of being intentionally influenced with negative effect; sense of being

unintentionally influenced with positive effect; and sense of being unintentionally influenced with negative effect.

The normative sample consisted of 50 two-parent two-child families, which completed the eight scales. The ages of the participating adolescents were equivalent to the ages of the adolescents of the clinical family. The families had a younger adolescent between 11 and 15 years of age and an older adolescent between 15 and 19 years of age, and both adolescents participated in the study. All participating families lived in Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium. Family members were middle class Caucasian. The mean age of the mothers was 44.43 years (*SD* = 3.23), and their mean number of years of education was 14.72 (*SD* = 1.40). The fathers' mean age was 45.48 (*SD* = 3.94) and their mean number of years of education was 13.72 (*SD* = 2.23). On average, the parents have been living together for over 20 years (*SD* = 3.43). The mean family income was between $47,500 and $60,000. Family size ranged from 2 to 6 children (*M* = 3.06, *SD* = 1.02). For the siblings, the mean age of the older sibling was 17.45 (*SD* = 0.90), and the mean age of the younger sibling was 14.04 (*SD* = 1.15). The mean age difference between the siblings was 3.42 years, with a range from 1 to 7 years. Of the total sibling sample, 37% were boys and 63% were girls.

In order to perform SRM analysis, a round robin design was used, in which every family member had to rate all of his/her family relations. Reliabilities (Cronbach's α) for the eight scales ranged from .61 to .81. Results indicated that the family members' sense of influence and sense of being influenced, both intentional and unintentional, are primarily dependent on actor and relationship factors. Partner and family factors were found to be far less important. Significant reciprocity at the individual level was found for the older siblings' intentional positive influence. At the dyadic level, significant

reciprocity correlations were found for the mother-father relationship, for both intentional and unintentional positive influence, and for sense of influence as well as for sense of being influenced. In addition, for the sense of being intentionally positively influenced, reciprocity was found for the mother-younger sibling relationship and the older sibling-younger sibling relationship. Intra-generational similarities were not found in the normative sample.

For the present study, the four members of the clinical family were instructed to complete each of the eight scales for each of his/her three family relationships. Z scores for each SRM effect were then calculated.

Results

Results for the family members' sense of influence and sense of being influenced are reported in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively. Basic hypotheses and indications for therapeutic interventions will also be presented in this section. In-depth analysis of the SRM effects of this clinical family is provided in the discussion section.

Sense of influence. The SRM results for sense of influence (Table 1) indicated that the clinical family's family effect for sense of intentional positive influence is significantly lower than the family factor for the sample (Z = -2.28). This means that, in this family, a sense that one can intentionally please another family member is significantly less present than in the average family. On the other hand, the stepfather holds strong beliefs about his ability to have an intentional positive influence on the other family members (stepfather actor effect Z = 2.90). The older daughter seems to have lost a sense that she can have an intentional positive influence in this family (older daughter actor effect Z = -3.21). Only in her relationship to her stepfather does the older daughter feel that she can intentionally have

a positive influence (relationship effect older daughter-stepfather Z = 3.66).

Table 1. Z scores for Sense of Influence

Effect	Intentional-Positive	Intentional-Negative	Unintentional-Positive	Unintentional-Negative
Family	*- 2.28*			
Actor				
Mother	.40	- .13	- .14	1.12
Stepfather	*2.90*	- .23	.81	- 1.14
Older Daughter	*- 3.21*	.64	- .24	- .43
Younger Daughter	- .45	- .27	- .53	.46
Partner				
Mother				
Stepfather				
Older Daughter	.50			- .24
Younger Daughter				
Relationship				
Mother - Stepfather	*- 2.00*	1.75	- .96	- 1.26
Mother - Older Daughter				
Mother - Younger Daughter		*- 2.58*	.84	
Stepfather - Mother	.41	-.53	- .13	1.44
Stepfather - Older Daughter			.19	.77
Stepfather - Younger Daughter	.20		.04	.90
Older Daughter - Mother	*- 2.03*		- 1.00	*2.30*
Older Daughter - Stepfather	*3.66*		1.58	- .27
Older Daughter - Younger Daughter	- 1.45	*3.00*	- .49	- 1.79
Younger Daughter - Mother		- .23	1.03	
Younger Daughter - Stepfather	- 1.90	*2.11*	- .83	1.54
Younger Daughter - Older Daughter	.30	- 1.66	- .48	- .81

Note. Only Z scores for SRM effects with significant variance ($p < .05$) in the larger sample are reported. Z scores plus or minus 2 are in italics.

In her relationship to her mother, the older daughter feels low intentional positive influence (relationship effect older daughter-mother Z = -2.03). The combination of this lower sense of intentional positive influence with a higher sense of unintentional negative influence in the older daughter-mother relationship (Z = 2.30) deserves some attention. Apparently, the older daughter experiences alienation in her relationship to her mother: while, from her perspective, she fails to intentionally please her mother, she is aware of unintentional influence on her mother but only with respect to negative effects. Presumably, in the relationship with her mother, she

experiences something of the nature that "whatever I do, it will not please my mother". Perhaps this is one reason that she idealizes the relationship with her stepfather, and this idealization consolidates his position as saviour of the family.

Table 2. Z scores for Sense of Being Influenced

Effect	Intentional-Positive	Intentional-Negative	Unintentional-Positive	Unintentional-Negative
Family		.20		
Actor				
Mother	.86	1.03	- .80	.76
Stepfather	1.26	.03	.79	- .04
Older Daughter	- 1.79	.28	- 1.22	- .05
Younger Daughter	1.30	- 1.34	.97	- .68
Partner				
Mother				
Stepfather				
Older Daughter				- 1.08
Younger Daughter	*- 2.50*	.55		.67
Relationship				
Mother - Stepfather	*- 2.83*	1.81	*- 2.73*	.26
Mother - Older Daughter	- 1.21	- 1.31	- .19	
Mother - Younger Daughter	*3.93*	- .59	*3.28*	- .43
Stepfather - Mother	- .02	1.09	.45	.95
Stepfather - Older Daughter	1.56	.98	.16	.52
Stepfather - Younger Daughter	- 1.48	*- 2.15*	- .29	- 1.65
Older Daughter - Mother	*- 3.00*	*2.02*	*- 2.62*	- .26
Older Daughter - Stepfather	*4.55*	*- 4.24*	*4.64*	- 1.40
Older Daughter - Younger Daughter	*- 2.21*	*2.38*	*- 2.51*	
Younger Daughter - Mother	*3.44*	*- 3.09*	*2.26*	- .78
Younger Daughter - Stepfather	*- 2.57*	*3.15*	*- 2.26*	1.53
Younger Daughter - Older Daughter	- .50	.28	.26	- .62

Note. Only Z scores for SRM effects with significant variance ($p < .05$) in the larger sample are reported. Z scores plus or minus 2 are in italics.

In addition, the older daughter has a high sense that she can intentionally displease her sister (older daughter-younger daughter relationship effect Z = 3.00). Besides being angry at her younger sister, this high sense of intentional negative influence might indicate aggression from the older daughter towards the younger daughter. On the other hand, the younger daughter experiences her influence on her older sister quite differently. SRM disentangles relationship effects and indicates that the way the older sibling experiences her influence in the relationship with her younger sister is quite different from the

way the younger sibling experiences her influence in the relationship with her older sister. The polarized sense of the older daughter's positive influence in her family relationships can be further explored in the family therapy sessions.

The mother feels low intentional positive influence in the spouse relationship (mother-stepfather relationship effect Z = -2.00). Although not extreme, the mother also has a higher sense of intentional negative influence towards the stepfather (Z = 1.75). The mother seems to be dissatisfied with her spouse relationship. The stepfather experiences his influence in the relationship with his wife quite differently. Although reciprocity in the mother-father relationship was found in the larger sample, reciprocity in this spouse relationship cannot be hypothesized. On the other hand, in her relationship with the younger daughter, the mother experiences a low sense of intentional negative influence (mother-younger daughter relationship effect Z = -2.58). Although the mother's relationships with her daughters are discordant, she does not feel intentional negative influence towards the younger daughter. Unfortunately, the mother-older daughter relationship effects cannot be interpreted (no significant variance in the normative sample).

The last significant score regards the higher sense of intentional negative influence of the younger daughter in her relationship with the stepfather (younger daughter-stepfather relationship effect Z = 2.11). It is noteworthy that the relationship with her stepfather is the only relationship in which the younger daughter feels this intentional negative influence. The stepfather does not assess low sense of positive or high sense of negative influence in his family relationships. On the contrary, overall he has a higher sense of intentional positive influence (stepfather actor effect Z = 2.90). The younger daughter's higher sense of intentional negative influence

towards the stepfather probably indicates that she is questioning his position in the family. Family loyalties are possibly of importance, and this is a way in which the younger daughter stands up for her biological family relationships. This is another hypothesis to be explored in the family therapy.

To conclude the results of sense of influence, it is interesting to note that the scores for sense of intentional (as opposed to unintentional) influence were extreme. In addition, with the exception of two actor effects, relationship effects' scores were also extreme.

Sense of being influenced. The SRM results (Table 2) indicated that none of the actor effects has an extreme score. For the partner effects, the score of intentional positive influence from the younger daughter is low (younger daughter partner effect Z = -2.50). This means that the family members experience low intentional positive influence from the younger daughter. However, the mother does feel positively influenced by her younger daughter, both intentionally and unintentionally (mother-younger daughter relationship effects Z = 3.93 and Z = 3.28).

Examining the results of sense of being influenced, several extreme scores for the relationship effects are observed. Moreover, these scores seem to form a pattern. Extreme scores for intentional positive and unintentional positive influence are similar, and each time the scores for intentional negative influence are the opposite. Moreover, the family members experience their sense of being influenced much more extremely than their sense of influence. Apparently, assessing the influence one is experiencing from others is easier and more accessible for a person than evaluating one's own influence, especially when relationships are problematic.

The older daughter assesses her sense of being influenced in her family relations extremely. She experiences low positive influence

from her mother (older daughter-mother relationship effect Z scores = -3.00 and -2.62) and from her younger sister (older daughter-younger daughter relationship effect Z scores = -2.21 and -2.51). Furthermore, the older daughter feels much intentional negative influence from the mother (Z = 2.02) and her younger sister (Z = 2.38). On the other hand, the older daughter's sense of being positively influenced by the stepfather is very high (Z scores = 4.55 and 4.64), and her sense of being negatively influenced in her relationship with the stepfather is very low (Z = -4.24). The way the older daughter is experiencing her relationships with her mother and sister is characterized by a massive feeling of being negatively influenced. And the way she experiences the influence from her stepfather indicates idealization. In combination with the older daughter's very low sense of intentional positive influence in her family relationships, family therapeutic interventions should focus on the way she experiences her family relations. Otherwise, her separation process as an adolescent could be disrupted, with possible problems in building future relationships.

The mother-younger daughter relationship and younger daughter-mother relationship show similar patterns − i.e., high sense of being positively influenced and low sense of being intentionally negatively influenced. Reciprocity between the mother and the younger daughter for their sense of being intentionally positively influenced can be hypothesized, because the corresponding reciprocity correlation in the larger sample was significant. This is a remarkable observation, because it does not conform to the mother's and the family therapist's description. Maybe this observation reveals a hidden coalition between the mother and the younger daughter. Or maybe the mother and the younger daughter have never been aware of this sense of being influenced positively by each other, because it was

never brought to light. These hypotheses are other possible guides for clinical interventions.

The mother experiences low positive influence from the stepfather (mother-stepfather relationships effects Z scores = -2.83 and -2.73). The mother does not feel she can please the stepfather (see results for sense of influence), nor does she experience positive influence from him. Because the stepfather does not seem to assess his spouse relationship similarly, it would be interesting to explore his awareness of the mother's sense of their relationship in the therapeutic sessions.

The younger daughter feels low positive influence from her stepfather towards her (younger daughter-stepfather relationship effects Z scores = - 2.57 and -2.26), and high intentional negative influence (Z = 3.15). On the other hand, the stepfather does not feel intentionally negatively influenced by the younger daughter (stepfather-younger daughter relationship effect Z = -2.15). The way the stepfather assesses his influence and his being influenced in his family relations indeed indicates that he is trying to stay neutral. But SRM provides the opportunity to measure relationship effects. The relationship effects in which the stepfather is involved demonstrate that the way the other family members experience their influence in the relationship with the stepfather is not neutral at all. It seems that the stepfather is, reluctantly, caught up in the family tangle.

To summarize the results for both sense of influence and sense of being influenced: two actor effects out of the 32 actor factors had an extreme score (6%), one partner effect out of the six partner factors was significant (17%), and 27 relationship effects out of the 81 relationship factors had extreme scores (33%). Of these significant relationship effects, 19 of the 39 (49%) concerned intentional influence, and eight of the 42 (19%) concerned unintentional

influence. In sum, relationship effects for intentional influence, in particular, had extreme scores.

DISCUSSION

This paper presents an illustration of the SRM approach to family assessment. The SRM model tries to grasp the complexities of a family system. SRM provides a means to disentangle the various levels of family dynamics (i.e., the individuals, the relationships, and the family), and to reveal the relative importance of these levels to systemic functioning. Therefore, SRM is an interesting tool for performing family assessment from a systemic perspective. The main reason a family therapist performs family assessment is to obtain perspectives that help guide interventions.

What are possible perspectives a family therapist could learn from the SRM assessment of the clinical family presented in this paper? The score for the intentional positive family effect was extreme. An extreme family effect informs the therapist about specific ways in which the family members associate with one another. In this family, the members have a low sense that they can please each other. The sense that one can please someone else does not "live" in this family (in comparison to what can be expected within the "average" family). The family therapist could hypothesize that this family has no culture in which to communicate pleasant relational experiences towards each other. Therefore, a possible guide for the therapy could be: when joining (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981) the family system, the therapist must be very deliberate when he/she explores what is still going well between the family members, as they as they do not have the habit (or skills) to think in such a way about their relations.

Only two actor effects had extreme scores (both the stepfather and the older daughter experience a sense of intentional positive

influence). An actor effect informs the therapist about the person or "being" of a family member in the family, independent of a particular family relationship. The stepfather feels he can positively influence the others in the family. But the older daughter has a low sense that she can influence the other family members positively. This informs the family therapist that the older daughter does not feel well in her family relations (the older daughter has lost a sense that she can influence her family relationships positively). Her person and position in the family need special attention from the family therapist. In addition, it is remarkable that only two actor effects (out of the 32 significant actor factors in the normative sample) had extreme scores in this family. This means that the 30 other actor effects are situated in the "normal" variance. Consequently, it can be argued that the problems in this family are not associated with "personality" problems of the family members, but are due to problematic relational functioning. In other words, the person of these family members cannot be addressed as the cause of the problems (e.g., personal failure), but the problems reflect a relational or bidirectional responsibility. This is a truly systemic way of thinking.

Because SRM disentangles "personal" factors (actor and partner effects) and relationship factors, possible directions for clinical interventions are indicated. Relationship effects "contextualize" the person in his family relations (Cook & Kenny, 2004) and thus offer guidelines regarding which relationships the family therapist can focus on. Consequently, interventions on the relationship level will also affect the actor and partner effects of a particular family member. For example, therapeutic interventions for the older daughter could focus on her relationship with the mother. If the older daughter-mother relationship could change in such a way that the older daughter would experience some sense of positive influence towards her mother, the

older daughter's overall low sense of positive influence will be affected. Moreover − and this illuminates interdependence − such interventions indirectly affect the older daughter-stepfather relationship and, therefore, they could be one way of relieving the stepfather of his saviour role.

The preceding points can be reiterated for the partner effects. Only one partner effect had an extreme score (the younger daughter for sense of being intentionally positively influenced). The way the older daughter experiences the relationship with her younger sister can be of particular interest to the family therapist. The younger daughter probably has an inadequate idea about what she elicits from her older sister and, most likely, she has no idea why she has such effects on her older sister. Interventions on the level of the sibling relationship could facilitate a process with the younger sibling in which she obtains some insight into what she elicits in this relationship and, as a consequence of interdependence, in her other family relationships. That is, the younger sibling could get some sense of her partner effect. A hypothesis is that problematic behaviour and development − or even psychopathology, from a systemic perspective − are associated with a person's complete lack of a sense that he/she has partner effects. If one has no such sense, one's world can become totally unpredictable and intangible. Consequently, the person experiences his (relational) world as a constant sense of being negatively influenced by others. People with borderline personality disorder, for example, are known to structure their world in this way (Reijmers, 1999). This issue needs further research.

Many relationship effects had extreme scores. This demonstrates how a family therapist can benefit from SRM. Instead of general statements about family members' feelings in the family, relationship effects provide some insight into the dynamics of the

system and the practicability of the family for the therapist. For example, in the clinical family, the therapist could focus on the mother's sense of influence in her spouse relationship, especially because the stepfather experiences the relationship with his wife differently. Is there enough room for the mother to exert a positive influence towards her partner? Or is the stepfather so preoccupied with his role as saviour that the mother does not sufficiently experience herself being in the spouse relationship?

These analyses demonstrate that SRM family assessment is a useful tool for constructing systemic hypotheses and, consequently, guidelines for interventions. However, SRM family assessment is not intended to replace the family therapist's other psychological assessment or interview-based methodologies. Instead, SRM should be viewed as a complement to other assessment techniques (Cook, 2005). Moreover, the "philosophy" of SRM offers the family therapist a model from which to approach the complexities of the family system. A limitation of the SRM family assessment tool presented in this paper is that the normative sample (50 families) was rather small. A larger sample would probably have revealed other significant SRM factors, which would increase the scope of the SRM family assessment.

Some hypotheses about sense of intentional and unintentional influence

The content of the family assessment was sense of influence (and being influenced), for intentional and unintentional influence. Recent research has shown that most family assessment instruments measure only two or three constructs − i.e., affiliation, activity, and influence or control (Jacob & Windle, 1999). Consequently, Cook (2005) argues that future research regarding the SRM family

assessment methodology must focus on these constructs, as they are fundamental to family functioning. What could we learn from the clinical family concerning influence and the distinction between intentional and unintentional influence? The hypothesis that the members of the clinical family would have less sense of unintentional influence could not be validated. The response pattern the clinical family offered was more complicated. For sense of influence, the scores for intentional (and not unintentional) influence, in particular, were extreme. Family members seem to polarize their sense of intentional influence in their family relationships. Obviously, in this clinical family, influence is more exclusively felt as power or control, which demonstrates the centrality of the power issue in problematic systems (Haley, 1980). It seems as if these family members think, without any doubt, that they know (or can control) their effects in a relationship. The relationship partner does not really matter, as one knows in advance the meaning of one's influence (positive or negative effect) for the relationship partner. On the other hand, the scores for unintentional influence were less extreme. It seems as if some doubt creeps into the family members' perspectives about their unintentional influence. A hypothesis is that, by introducing a dimension of un-intentionality into the family members' sense of influence, they are somewhat forced to consider the perspective of the relationship partner, as they cannot be sure about the meaning of their outcome. Un-intentionality embraces another important relational dimension and offers the therapist opportunities to focus on a relational dimension in addition to the (power) battle over who is in charge of the relation. Unintentional influence seems to escape the struggle for power in the family. Systemic psychotherapy starts from the premise that initial change can only be achieved in those domains that are not completely corrupted by conflicts (Hoyt, 1998). Therefore,

unintentional influence between family members is probably a useful and practicable area for achieving initial change in the system. This is an issue for further research.

For sense of being influenced, many scores for intentional and unintentional positive influence were extreme, and family members reported about these senses in a similar way. The sense of being unintentionally positively influenced is the only sense of unintentional influence for which the family members had extreme scores. From a psychotherapeutic perspective, this finding does not look very hopeful. A family member who does not experience that another family member can intentionally please him or her experiences the same for unintentional positive influence. If the family member were to have a less polarized view of unintentional influence, the therapist would have some space in which to introduce a different perspective. On the other hand, unlike the scores for intentional negative influence, the scores for unintentional negative influence were not extreme. For the sense of being negatively influenced, the differentiation between intentional and unintentional influence can probably be psychotherapeutically useful. These hypotheses need further research as well.

In sum, two topics were discussed in the present paper. First, SRM was presented as a useful model for assessing the complexities of family functioning from a systemic perspective. The usefulness of SRM was demonstrated by the assessment of a clinical family. Second, sense of influence − and, more specifically, the distinction between intentional and unintentional influence − was discussed as a fruitful concept for family assessment from a systemic perspective. Analysis of the reports provided by the clinical family yielded some hypotheses concerning the significance of unintentional influence for

the functioning of family systems, and suggestions were offered for further research.

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CHAPTER 6

General Discussion

In this final chapter, the main findings are summarized, and theoretical, methodological, and clinical considerations and implications are discussed. In addition, limitations and suggestions for future research are formulated.

MAIN FINDINGS

Test of hypotheses

The hypotheses formulated in the 'General Introduction' (chapter 1) will be systematically discussed.

The first hypothesis was that children and parents would use the distinction between intentional and unintentional influence (Huston, 2002) to construct meanings about children's influence in the bidirectional parent-child relationship (Hypothesis 1). This hypothesis could be validated in the phenomenological study. Both children and parents construct children's influence on their parents as mainly unintentional. Children clearly distinguish their influence on their parents from power and control: having an influence is not the same as controlling the parents. On the contrary, children firmly emphasize the essential dimension of their influence (and having a sense of this unintentional influence) for their personal development and the development of the relationship with their parents. Consequently, equating their influence with power would minimize the significance of their person in this relationship. Parents focus on the continuous sense of involvement and commitment that children call forth, and this massive influence is in the parents' narratives not constructed as intentional from the children's side, but as a consequence of the interdependent (Kelley, 1979) and long-term nature (Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997) of the parent-child relationship.

This finding was validated in the Q-methodological study. In several social constructions children's influence is opposed to power and in not a single understanding children's influence is equated with power. On the other hand, a most central understanding of children's influence is the recognition of the full person and partnership of the child in the relation. This core meaning pinpoint a basic principle of bidirectionality: namely, that parents and children are equally agentic

(Kuczynski, Harach, & Bernardini, 1999). Although an equivalence of agency is constructed in our culture, it seems to be much more difficult for people to specify the contents of children's agency. Children mainly derive their agency from the responsiveness of the parents. The only clear content of their influence children emphasize is the fact that they can teach their parents many things. In this way children define the active dimension of their agency. Parents and other adults stress the influence from children on the person and personal development of the parent, thereby giving some language to the contents of children's influence. However, none of the parents could say anything about how this massive influence affected their actual behaviour towards their children or how it influenced the concrete interactions with their children. In other words, these contents of children's influence do not "live" in the daily parent-child interactions and thus also not in the parent-child relationship. This leads us to the conclusion that while the importance of children's influence in the bidirectional parent-child relationship is socially constructed, the social construction of children's agentic features is in an embryonic stage of development.

Children's influence seems to be obvious, pervasive, but hard to describe. It is difficult to find language for something that is not socially constructed. In addition, reciprocity in the parent-child relationship is designated as an important condition for the development of children's agency. This means that children's influence emerges out of a parent-child relationship context characterized by mutuality (Parpal & Maccoby, 1985; Kochanska, 1997). Children describe their influence as a process of negotiation and accommodation: children do not primarily derive their sense of influence or agency from the accomplishment of certain goals in the parent-child relationship. On the other hand, children do recognize the

power side of their influence on their parents, but this is only one small part of the influence concept. Also parents and other adults reject power as an appropriate description of children's influence. Both children and parents feel ambivalent on the topic of children's influence and struggle with the difference between influence and power (Kuczynski, 2003). Consequently neither the children nor the parents could talk about the more non-strategic intentional influence from children. The most significant finding from the phenomenological and Q study was that by exploring processes of child-to-parent influence, family members became aware of a dimension of unintentional influence, in addition to the more conscious, intentional influence processes in family relations.

Results of the family study support this embryonic evidence about the existence of a sense of unintentional influence in family relationships and that family members differentiate between sense of intentional and sense of unintentional influence. The main topic in this family study was whether or not sense of intentional influence (and being intentionally influenced) and sense of unintentional influence (and being unintentionally influenced) are affected by the same or different factors. Two hypotheses were of interest. First, we expected intentional and unintentional influence to be dependent on different Social Relations Model (SRM) factors. The hypothesis was that family members' sense of intentional influence would be more dependent on actor factors than on partner factors, whereas family members' sense of unintentional influence would be more dependent on partner factors than on actor factors (Hypothesis 2). The hypothesis could not be validated. Both sense of intentional influence (and being influenced) and sense of unintentional influence (and being influenced) are more dependent on actor factors than on partner factors. Moreover, although significant partner variance was only

found for the children, it was not specifically found for unintentional influence. The fact that partner factors were only significant for the children is consistent with the traditional child effect research (Cook, 2001). Child effects are SRM partner effects as children might elicit something from the parent. Second, the hypothesis that relationship factors would be important for both family members' sense of intentional and unintentional influence and being influenced (Hypothesis 3), could be validated.. Relationship variance was especially large for family members' sense of being influenced. Nevertheless these results must be interpreted very cautiously because in the family study relationship factors have not been partitioned from error variance. The absence of differences between sense of intentional and unintentional influence with respect to SRM factors affecting both senses, is clinically and theoretically important but does not devaluate the significance to distinguish both senses as was demonstrated in our qualitative research.

Significant relationship factors are an indication of interdependence. In addition, two significant family factors were found. A family factor is an additional source of interdependence because a significant family effect reflects correlations among family members' ratings (Cook, 1993). However, in our study mainly actor factors were significant, in addition to significant relationship-error variance. Consequently our family study does not present evidence of 'partner'-interdependence for family members' sense of influence. Because our study elaborates on Cook's study of sense of control in family systems (Cook, 1993), and Cook did find larger amounts of partner variance in proportion to actor variance, the question is why our study could not demonstrate "partner"-interdependence. Is it a problem of measurement, or do the senses of influence investigated in

our study rather reflect "actor-personality" and not "partner-interdependent" dimensions. These questions will be addressed later.

SRM reciprocity correlations reflect mutuality of interpersonal influence in relationships (Cook, 2001). Positive reciprocity correlations were only found for positive influence. This is in line with reciprocity theory (Parpal & Maccoby, 1985; Kochanska, 1997), in which processes of interpersonal influence are not only mutual but positively correlated with positive affect. Only in the spouse relationship positive reciprocity correlations were found for unintentional positive influence. Moreover, positive reciprocity correlations at the dyadic level were especially found for sense of being influenced. Assuming Cook's hypothesis that measures of Acquiescence are more indicative of a person's motivation to give influence to the partner than the partner's ability to influence (Cook, 1993), a sense of being influenced conveys a person's responsiveness to the partner's influence. Probably the larger amounts of relationship variance for sense of being influenced are related to this motivation to give influence to the partner. This means that a constructive mutuality is developed within the relationship when the partners are receptive and responsive to each other's positive influence. In other words, the hypothesis is that constructive reciprocity can be established when both partners grant permission to the other partner to influence him or her positively.

Our attempt to objectify interpersonal influence in family systems failed. Family members do not have shared perspectives on interpersonal influence in family relations, at least with respect to the way interpersonal influence was operationalized in our study. Probably the large amounts of actor variance for family members' sense of influence and sense of being influenced are related to this failure.

In the last study SRM was used as a model for family assessment and served to test the other hypotheses. The fourth hypothesis, that the clinical family members would especially deviate from the normative sample for relationship effects (Hypothesis 4) was validated: especially the relationship effect scores in the clinical family were extreme. On the other hand, the fifth hypothesis, that the members of the clinical family would have less sense of unintentional influence (Hypothesis 5), was not validated: generally the members of the clinical family have no lesser sense of unintentional influence. Finally, the sixth hypothesis, that especially the scores for intentional influence would be more extreme in the clinical family (Hypothesis 6), could be validated. In fact, extreme scores for family, actor, and partner effects only related to intentional influence.

Distinguishing unintentional from intentional influence: useful or not?

A main topic of this dissertation is the distinction between sense of intentional and sense of unintentional influence in family relationships. Clearly, the phenomenological and Q-methodological study point towards a useful distinction between both. However, which findings from the SRM studies presented here are relevant to this distinction? The family study did not yield important differences: family members' senses of intentional and unintentional influence are affected by the same interpersonal factors. The assumption that sense of unintentional influence would contain more interdependence could not be validated. In addition, the Analyses of Variance indicate that family members in general have a lesser sense of unintentional influence compared to intentional influence. The question remains: is a distinction useful or not?

Research in the domain of intentionality demonstrates that the folk concept of intentionality includes a dimension of awareness

(Malle & Knobe, 1997). Consequently when people are asked to *think about* their influence, thinking about their (and others') intentional influence will be more familiar and natural (and easier) as intentionality coincides with awareness and making sense of. Triggering a dimension of un-intentionality seems to confuse people, as it opposes a social construction about interpersonal influence (Eldering, 2006). A hypothesis is that the members of the clinical family are just as much confused about unintentional influence as the participants of the normative sample. Therefore the clinical family members have no lesser sense of unintentional influence, but seem to advance something different. In the clinical family sense of unintentional influence seems to escape the power battle: the conflicts seem to be fight out in the domain of intentional influence. Unintentional influence seems to soften the sharpness of the effects of one's outcome, also regarding sense of being unintentionally negatively influenced. A supposition is that although in the meaning construction of one's influence (and being influenced) the actor stays the "owner" of his or her intentional and unintentional effects, a dimension of un-intentionality decreases the actor's certainty about his or her effects. In other words, unintentional influence is a constructive area for psychotherapeutic change.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Cultural context of children's influence

A main assumption of bidirectional models is that influence does not stop at the borders of the parent-child or family relations (Kuczynski, 2003). Culture is a dynamic context for the development of relationships, while socio-cultural contexts are created by humans, their interactions and relationships (Hinde, 1997). This view is consistent with a social constructionist approach (Deaux & Philogène,

2001; Gergen, 1994; Hacking, 1999). The Belgian (Western) culture is an individualistic culture characterized by relatively democratic family power structure that values children's autonomy and self-expression (Beck, 1997). A development has taken place from a patriarchal family structure towards what is called a "negotiation-housekeeping" structure (De Swaan, 1983). The fact that negotiation and partnership are constructed by children, parents, and non-parents as fundamental dimensions of children's agency demonstrates the intertwinement of human functioning and culture. However, this family culture of negotiation has been criticized (e.g., Du Bois-Raymond, 2001). A main critique is that by one-sided emphasizing children's right to negotiate the child is de-contextualized from his or her personal (e.g., age, gender, and handicap), proximal (family and parents) and cultural (e.g., poverty) contexts, with risks for (further) marginalisation. Focusing on the context of the parent-child relation, a plea is made for re-contextualising the child within this 'by definition' vertical relationship. The acknowledgment of the vertical power structure of the parent-child relationship is fundamental to study this relationship (Maccoby, 2000).

This is in line with the first-order cybernetics in the family therapy field where hierarchical family structure is viewed as essential for the development of the family and its members (Minuchin, 1974). Power difference between parents and children is a necessary condition to enhance a development of the agency of both relationship partners. The ambivalence parents report when thinking about children's influence (chapter 1) is related to the parents' struggle about the difference between power and agency. The acknowledgment of the embedding of this ambivalence in a cultural discourse has psychotherapeutic implications and will be addressed later. To tackle this complex issue of acknowledging simultaneously the power

difference and equal agency of children and parents, Kuczynski (2003) suggested the interdependent asymmetrical power structure of the parent-child relationship. Hereby it is important to define and delineate the notions agency, influence, power, and control, and in addition, sense of agency, influence, and control.

(Sense of) influence, agency, power, and control

Influence is the umbrella construct encompassing the description of interaction between people in terms of effects (Burgoon, 1990; Hsiung & Bagozzi, 2003; Huston, 2002). Influence means that one has effects, that is, affects the other partner's thoughts, actions, and emotions. A consequence of this definition is that people do not own their influence as they are dependent upon the meaning of their effects for the other. This means that the notion sense of influence is by definition an interdependent construct. Considering the corollary of Watzlawick's axiom that one cannot not influence (Watzlawick, Jackson, & Beavin, 1967), there is always influence between people: bidirectional influence occurs constantly and processes of interpersonal influence are inevitable as a consequence of interdependence. Influence can be intentional or unintentional (Huston, 2002). Intentional influence refers to the process by which a relationship partner, to obtain particular effects, intentionally generates action to change the other partner's thoughts, behaviour or emotions. In contrast, unintentional influence is the process by which relationship partners affect one another without particular goal-directed intentions.

Power is the concept used to account for intentional influence (Huston, 2002). In this way, power equates control as control is used in the notion 'sense of control' (Cook, 1993). A sense of control reflects a person's beliefs about his or her ability to control or

intentionally influence outcomes (Bandura, 1997). When applied to the domain of parent-child relationships, power refers to the vertical structure of the relationship (Kuczynski, 2003; Maccoby, 2000), and especially the resources parents and children can rely on for experiencing and executing power. Agency also reflects intentional influence but differs from power or control as it regards what it is, although partly, to be a human in a relationship. Agency is a multifaceted construct including people's ability to think (construct meanings, make sense, interpret, plan, formulate goals) and to act strategically, and people's motives for autonomy. People are agents but do not always act as agents (L. Kuczynski, personal communication, May 16, 2007). Sometimes people act unintentional, automatic, and emotionally reactive. However, when people start to think about their effects, they may switch to an agentic mode and behave as agents. In contrast to power, a basic assumption of bidirectional influence in the parent-child relationship is that children and parents are equally agentic. Power, control, and agency refer to intentional influence. There is no parallel concept for unintentional influence (Huston, 2002).

Sense of agency means the felt awareness that one is an agent, i.e., that one can act and that one has an effect (Kuczynski et al., 1999). Cummings and Schermerhorn (2003) make a distinction between children's agentic behaviour and sense of agency emphasizing that both do not necessarily go together: a child can act strategically without much sense of agency when not achieving the desired goals. In this way, sense of agency is equated with self-efficacy and sense of control (Maccoby, 2003). This is a conceptual problem because the concept agency is clearly distinguished from power and control. In the sociological elaboration of the agency concept, agency is disconnected from intentionality. Agency refers to

the capacity to act and not to the intentions people have in doing things (Giddens, 1984). Moreover, it is by acting that people make a difference (Bateson, 1979) to a previous state of affairs. In sum, the notion sense of agency is theoretically problematic in at least two ways. First, how can sense of agency be clearly distinguished from sense of control? Second, does sense of agency include intentionality or does it merely reflect a person's belief about his or her ability to act and consequently to make a difference?

When talking about children's influence on their parents, both children and parents especially stress the unintentional dimension of this influence. Probably these results are also due to the methodology. The participants were free to think and talk about the topic without induction of prompts or descriptions of concrete situations. Consequently the participants were forced to talk about the interdependent nature of the relationship which is characterized by mutual responsiveness and inevitable influence. Children's influence is taken for granted as it is embedded in the relationship. Influence 'happens' and therefore it is not primarily linked with intentionality. Children and parents feel and describe that the 'being' of the child makes a difference in the relationship. An explicit example children offer about this influence, acknowledged by some parents, is that they teach the parents things. This teaching is not related to any intentional act, but emerges out of close nature of the relationship. This is one side of children's influence. We suggest that unintentional influence can become agency when this influence is realized and acknowledged in the relationship. When children can sense that their person, acting, and being in the relationship makes a difference (Bateson, 1979), the agency of the child is constructed in the relationship. Consistent with Bateson's maxim that difference is information ['differences that make a difference', (Bateson, 1979, p. 99)], the information must be

constructive, for the person involved and for the system, to enhance survival and development of the system. On the other hand, research indicates that when prompts or concrete situations are offered to the participants in order to describe children's influence, children and parents can clearly and easily describe children's strategic and intentional influence (Hildebrandt & Kuczynski, 1998; Ta, Kuczynski, Bernardini, & Harach, 1999). Children's intentional influence has at least two sides. First, children can intentionally act to manipulate their parents or to get something done from them. This reflects the power or control side of children's influence (e.g., Kerr & Stattin, 2003). Second, our interviews with the children also indicated that children can intentionally act to please their parents, without looking for a specific advantage. In sum, children's agency reflects the equal contribution of the child in the construction of the parent-child relationship. A hypothesis about the difficulty to capture the contents of children's agency is the lack of language. When children and parents are asked to talk about 'children's influence', they take children's influence for granted what makes it difficult to talk about specific contents. When parents and children are induced with prompts they emphasize the strategic nature of the influence (power and control) or they talk about a similar influence as the parents have on the children. There is no language to specify the particular agency of children. Although children and parents feel and experience the difference, they have no 'map to cover the territory' (paraphrasing Kozybski's maxim that the 'map is not the territory').

Because sense of control was already investigated in parent-child and family relations (Cook, 1993), we wanted to focus on sense of unintentional influence and sense of intentional influence in family relations, with sense of intentional influence operationalized in a different way than sense of control. Therefore intentionality and

valence of effect were systematically manipulated. Cook (1993) clearly demonstrated interdependence for family members' sense of control. Because unintentional influence is by definition embedded in the interdependent nature of family relationships and consequently taken for granted, as was demonstrated by exploring children's influence, we expected more interdependence for sense of unintentional influence. However, this could not be validated. On the contrary, Cook's measures which focus on the control dimension of influence obtained even more 'partner'-interdependence than our measures for intentional influence. We suggest two possible explanations for these results. First, there is a problem of measurement. This will be discussed in the next (methodological) section. Second, family members do not have standard opinions about other family members' influence as investigated in our study. Whether or not a family member can be pleased or displeased (or can please or displease), intentionally or unintentionally, is not shared by the other family members. On the other hand, whether or not a family member is controllable (or can control) is shared between the other family members.

Probably the difference between control and influence is that control is a linear construct while influence is not. When a person wants to control the other person, this person can acquiesce or not acquiesce. On the other hand, when a person wants to do something that is pleasant for the other person, the actor is completely dependent upon the meaning of his or her effect for the other person. There is a vast difference between intentions and effects of influence. Consequently the receiver must give feedback to the actor about the effect otherwise the actor can only hypothesize about the effect. In fact, for unintentional influence the actor is completely dependent on the feedback of the receiver. This dependence seems to make the actor

even more uncertain and less explicit in his or her ratings of unintentional effects, as the Analyses of Variance indicate. Apparently such feedback loops are possible within a specific relationship, as the significant relationship factors demonstrate. However, relationship variance was not partitioned from error so further analyses can not be made.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research project is characterized by methodological pluralism. Children's agency and processes of influence in family systems are complex issues that require a multi-method approach (Parke, 2002). However, several problems and limitations have to be discussed.

The qualitative methods used in our research could not reveal many significant contents of children's agency. Especially the Q study was developed to meet this topic but failed in this respect. Probably the word 'influence' is problematic and not sufficiently helpful or supportive for the participants (children, parents, non-parents, professionals) to think about children's agency. The use of other words like 'take part' or 'contribution' might be more helpful and guiding for the participants. Furthermore, dimensions of intentional and unintentional influence could be disentangled using questions such as: 'when do children take an active part in' and 'what is the child's contribution simply by the fact of being a part of the relationship'. The use of well-considered words might trigger more content dimensions of children's agency. On the other hand, capitalizing on the methodology used in the phenomenological study, which asked directly about influence, might also be meaningful. It would give opportunities to focus on the inarticulateness,

defensiveness, and taken for granted nature of influence in close relationships.

Because the hypothesis was that unintentional influence index the interdependent nature of parent-child, and in addition, family relationships, we wanted to operationalize unintentional influence in a clear way by simply manipulating intentionality and valence of outcome. This attempt was in some aspects problematic and looking back, quite simplistic. In the phenomenological study and the pilot study the adolescents offered evidence for the existence of a sense of unintentional influence. In fact, when the items were tested with the adolescents in the pilot study, it was clear for them what was meant by intentional and unintentional influence. In addition, some of them stated that the items are not easy to be answered, because, although unintentional influence is very recognizable, it is difficult to link it with real life events. In retrospect, these adolescents were telling the same story as the adolescents in the phenomenological study: influence is obvious, but difficult to talk about. Consequently, while we intended to make it easy for the participants by asking simple questions about their influence in family relationships (please or displease other family members, or being pleased or displeased by other family members), we made it very difficult because we asked about specific effects. The participants seem to have trouble to connect the items of the unintentional-influence scales with daily life experiences, while the items of the intentional-influence scales are so obvious that the participants merely response on the valence of the effect. As a consequence the scores of the participants show a regression toward the mean.

Future research will be necessary to fine-tune the scales, i.e., more reliable scale construction and validity testing. On the other hand, our family study also indicates that self-reports may not be the

most appropriate method to investigate sense of influence in family systems. Probably self-reports are not suited to disentangle intentionality/un-intentionality, because self-reports induce thinking about something and thinking includes awareness that coincides with intentionality (Malle & Knobe, 1997), but not with un-intentionality. It is difficult to think about something one is not aware about. That is the difficulty the children stress when they have to think about their influence. It is possible to think about this from a meta-position, but than the question remains how to demonstrate interdependence, because in a meta-position one is talking about interdependence. In sum, other appropriate methodologies might be necessary to tackle these issues. On the other hand, reporting on a 'sense' of influence requires reflection and introspections, which makes self-report a suitable method. It is not obvious to grasp people's sense of influence without asking them to report on it. From here, it is not clear how we can solve this dilemma. Follow-up research could make use of other framings, other wordings in self-report and tackle the challenge to find the best suitable method.

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

Clinical and psychotherapeutic practice must be underpinned by research, also a family therapeutic practice (Eisler, 2007). Which ideas and suggestions derived from our research can be useful for the family therapist? We present some ideas and suggestions without elaborating on the methodological implications for the psychotherapeutic practice.

A first issue concerns how to make room for the child's agency in family therapy. A conceptual problem is the difference between power and agency as was highlighted above. Parents and children feel relational equality and inequality simultaneously but

have no framework to think about this. First, introducing the notions and difference between agency and power in the therapy can be helpful: language is offered to think about the ambivalence between equal and unequal characteristics of the relationship. Our research indicates that children's influence does not equate power but is mainly an invitation for negotiation and accommodation. A family is principally not an area of strategic action but rather a system of dialectical tuning to one another. Second, research indicates that this issue 'lives' within our culture but is not solved. This means that culture does not provide ready-made solutions for the family. This insight can help the therapist to re-connect the family with the cultural discourse, a main goal for the systemic therapist (Hedges, 2005; McNamee, 1996). In fact, by dealing with their difficulties the family participates in a broader societal dialogue.

The introduction of the notion influence in psychotherapy offers some opportunities. First, a consequence of Huston's (2002) definition of influence is that people do not own their influence as they are dependent upon the meaning of their effects for the other person. In other words, there is a vast difference between intentions and effects. The large actor variances in the SRM study mean that family members do think they own their influence: people do not make automatically a difference between intentions and effects. Consequently it is natural that misunderstandings between family members are rather the rule than the exception. Second, the corollary of Watzlawick's axiom that one cannot not influence implies that there is much unintentional influence between humans because in our daily life we are not always engaged in agentic action. Families live together and when things are fine people do not have an explicit sense of these unintentional influence processes as our family study indicates. However, when people are invited (Gergen, 1999) to think

about influence in their relationships they discover this unintentional dimension. And when they talk about this unintentional dimension they talk about the nature and not the content of the relationship: the commitment, responsiveness, and involvement. When family functioning is problematic, family members' sense of influence is narrowed. The SRM study of the clinical family indicates that scores for intentional influence become extreme. The therapist can search for family experiences and narratives which are not saturated (White & Epston, 1990) by intentionality. Family therapy does not try to eliminate the problematic area, but tries to create a dimension next to the problem-saturated family narrative.

In addition, SRM offers many possibilities for the family therapist. SRM is a statistical model and a way of thinking about families and relationships. The strength of SRM is that it provides means to think about and demonstrate interdependence in families. A major critique of some family therapists with respect to the constructivist and social constructionist movement in family therapy is that family therapists seem to have forgotten the family itself (Minuchin, 1998). SRM offers the family therapist again a theory and a model about families. The SRM family assessment of the clinical family indicates especially deviant scores for relationship effects. This means that the family therapist is informed that in this family, interventions must focus on the relationship level. But SRM considers personal factors as well: interdependence does not mean that persons and their personalities are ignored. Especially significant partner effects are interesting. In fact, a SRM partner effect reflects possibly unintentional influence as the person involved might not be aware of the kind of influence he or she elicits from other family members. Maybe the study of SRM partner factors is another appropriate way to study processes of unintentional influence in family systems.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations and suggestions for future research have been discussed throughout this dissertation and in this general discussion. Especially methodological problems and the limited sample sizes were considered (e.g., only one clinical family participated). Moreover, the basic principle of his dissertation, that is, the theory of bidirectionality and interdependence, may be questioned. Yet another important limitation has to be considered.

A sense of unintentional influence was found exploring the child-to-parent direction of influence. Because this dimension could be theoretically underpinned (Huston, 2002), the research scope was broadened to all family relationships. Consequently the supposition was that a dimension of unintentional influence would be a factor in all family relationship influence processes. Probably it would have been more adequate to investigate first this dimension of unintentional influence in the other family relationships (spouse relationship, parent-to-child relationship, and sibling relationship) before applying SRM to the constructs. Moreover, the items were only tested out with children and not with adults, assuming that when children would understand the concepts the adults would too. Actually, this is in contradiction with a basic assumption of this dissertation, that is, children are agentic beings in their own right. Apparently we underestimated the children but overestimated the adults.

CONCLUSION

Bidirectional influence occurs constantly. This dissertation was about how this continuous flow of influence relates to family members' sense of influence in family relationships. Acknowledgment of children's agency and the distinction between intentional and unintentional influence were presented as possible punctuations to

extend our understandings of processes of influence in families. The Social Relations Model was implemented to tackle these complex issues of interdependence in families and to underpin empirically a psychotherapeutic practice. At last, trying to understand every day life complexities in order to help troubled people, was the main objective of our effort.

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SAMENVATTING

Deze dissertatie gaat over invloedsprocessen in de ouder-kind en familierelaties en kan onderverdeeld worden in twee delen. Het eerste deel rapporteert over onderzoek naar de invloed van kinderen op hun ouders. Meer specifiek werd onderzoek verricht naar de betekenisconstructies over deze kinderinvloed zowel binnen de ouder-kind relatie zelf als binnen het bredere maatschappelijke discours. In het tweede deel richt het onderzoek zich op alle familierelaties. De onderzoeksvraag was door welke interpersoonlijke en gezinsfactoren de constructie van een besef van invloed van de gezinsleden beïnvloed wordt. Hiervoor werd er gebruik gemaakt van het Social Relations Model (SRM; Kenny & La Voie, 1984). Relationele invloedsprocessen betreffen zowel gedrags- als cognitief-dialectische processen. In deze dissertatie richten we ons enkel op de cognitief-dialectische processen. We benaderen gezinsleden als betekenisverleners en beschouwen betekenisconstructie als een centrale component voor gezins- en relationele ontwikkeling (Hinde, 1997).

In het huidige onderzoek van de ouder-kind relaties staan bidirectionele modellen centraal (Kuczynski, 2003; Parke, 2002). Bidirectionaliteit benadrukt het voortdurend gezamenlijke voorkomen van beide invloedsrichtingen − van ouder naar kind en van kind naar ouder − in een complex wederkerend en dialectisch proces (Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997). Een belangrijke aanname van de cognitief-dialectische bidirectionele modellen betreft de gelijkwaardige ‘agency’ van kinderen en ouders (Kuczynski, Harach, & Bernardini, 1999), ondanks een verschil in macht (Maccoby, 2000). ‘Agency’ (Bandura, 2001) betekent dat men mensen beschouwd als actors met de capaciteit om intentioneel doelgericht te handelen teneinde verandering te initiëren en betekenissen te construeren op basis van

relationele ervaringen. Dit betekent dat kinderen een gelijkwaardige invloed hebben t.a.v. hun ouders en de ontwikkeling van de relatie als de ouders zelf, alhoewel de 'agency' van beiden intrinsiek verschillend is (Dix & Branca, 2003). Tot op heden was er weinig onderzoek gedaan naar de betekenisverleningen van kinderen zelf m.b.t. hun invloed in de ouder-kind relatie. Bovendien was er weinig vergelijkend onderzoek gebeurd tussen de perspectieven van kinderen en ouders.

In een eerste fenomenologische studie werden kinderen (leeftijd 11 tot 15 jaar) en ouders uit eenzelfde gezin geïnterviewd over de invloed van de kinderen op hun ouders. De data werden verwerkt volgens de interpretatief fenomenologische methode (Smith, 1995). Kinderen benadrukken het niet-intentionele karakter van hun invloed en onderscheiden hun invloed duidelijk van macht, controle, en manipulatie. Slechts een klein deel van hun invloed betreft macht en dit is het deel waar de kinderen ook onderling over (kunnen) praten. Kinderen leiden hun invloed voornamelijk af van de ontvankelijkheid van de ouders en benoemen hiermee het reflexieve karakter van hun invloed. Het gelijkstellen van hun invloed met macht betekent voor kinderen dan ook het minimaliseren van hun persoon in de relatie: hun invloed betekent evenmin dat ouders hen moeten kopiëren, maar wel onderhandeling en accommodatie. Over de inhoud van hun invloed konden de kinderen weinig zeggen. Kinderen vinden hun invloed evident maar zeer moeilijk te beschrijven. Bovendien benadrukken kinderen het existentiële karakter van dit invloedsbesef, niet enkel m.b.t. de ontwikkeling van de relatie met hun ouders, maar ook m.b.t. hun totale emotionele en sociale ontwikkeling. De betekenisconstructies van de ouders worden gekenmerkt door ambivalentie: ouders worstelen met het verschil tussen macht en invloed. Ouders benadrukten het massieve karakter van de invloed van

hun kinderen maar konden erg moeilijk de specifieke invloed van het betrokken kind beschrijven, ondanks een erkenning van verschil tussen de kinderen. Geen enkele ouder kon vertellen hoe deze invloed op de persoonlijke ontwikkeling van de ouder zich vertaalt in de concrete omgang met het kind. Ouders stellen kinderinvloed niet gelijk aan macht en benadrukken in die zin ook het voornamelijk niet-intentionele karakter van deze invloed. Kinderen en ouders vonden het allebei een boeiend maar moeilijk onderwerp: kinderen hadden er nog niet over nagedacht, aan ouders was het nog nooit gevraagd. Het evidente en moeilijk articuleerbare van kinderinvloeden verwijst naar de interafhankelijkheid die gezinsrelaties kenmerkt: (voornamelijk niet-)intentionele invloed is ingebed in en construeert gezinsrelaties wat het moeilijk maakt om hierover te praten.

Aangezien uit de fenomenologische studie bleek dat kinderen en ouders moeilijk inhoud konden geven aan deze invloed van kinderen, werd er geopteerd voor een bredere sociaal constructionistische ingang (Deaux & Philogène, 2001; Gergen, 1994; Hacking, 1999) en werd er een Q methodologische studie gedaan (Stainton Rogers, 1995). Q factoranalyse werd apart uitgevoerd op de Q sorts van kinderen en volwassenen (ouders en niet-ouders). Analyses uit de fenomenologische studie werden bevestigd. Daarnaast bleek dat zowel voor volwassenen als kinderen de invloed van kinderen betekent dat kinderen volwaardige en gelijkwaardige partners en actors zijn in de relatie met hun ouders. Een inhoud die voornamelijk door de kinderen geconstrueerd wordt betreft het gegeven dat ouders veel van kinderen leren. Alhoewel gelijkwaardigheid en partnerschap sociaal geconstrueerd is, blijkt de inhoud van kinderinvloeden nog slechts embryonaal ontwikkeld in de sociale constructies. Blijkbaar is er hiervoor in onze cultuur weinig taal aanwezig.

Door de ongewone kind-naar-ouder richting van invloed te bestuderen werden de deelnemers aan het onderzoek zich bewust van een niet-intentionele dimensie van invloed, naast de meer vertrouwde intentionele invloed. Aangezien de deelnemers het belang van dit onderscheid tussen intentionele en niet-intentionele invloed benadrukten, wensten we verder te onderzoeken of een besef van intentionele en een besef van niet-intentionele invloed geconstrueerd worden door gelijkaardige of verschillende interpersoonlijke en gezinsfactoren. De aanname hierbij was dat een besef van invloed een interafhankelijk construct is (Kelley, 1979). Het Social Relations Model is een statistisch model om deze interafhankelijk te onderzoeken en te testen. Een invloedsbesef van persoon A t.a.v. persoon B wordt beïnvloed door verschillende factoren tegelijkertijd: kenmerken van persoon A (actor factor), kenmerken van persoon B (partner factor), kenmerken van de relatie (relatiefactor), en gezinskenmerken (gezinsfactor). Een besef van controle (intentioneel invloedsbesef in de zin van intentioneel iemand overtuigen of manipuleren) in gezinnen was al onderzocht met SRM (Cook, 1993, 2001). Wij wensten dit onderzoek aan te vullen door de factoren intentionaliteit en valentie van effect te manipuleren (2X2 design, en dit tweemaal: voor een besef van invloed en een besef van beïnvloed worden). Schalen (vragenlijsten) werden geconstrueerd en toegepast op 50 families (twee ouders en twee kinderen) in een round-robin design. SRM analyses gaven geen specifieke verschillen tussen een besef van intentionele en niet-intentionele invloed. Beide beseffen worden voornamelijk beïnvloed door actor en relatiespecifieke factoren. Significante familiefactoren werden gevonden voor twee van de acht schalen, en significante partner variantie werd enkel gevonden voor de deelnemende adolescenten.

Bovendien bleek dat invloed in gezinnen niet geobjectiveerd kan worden. Confirmatorische factoranalyses op de verschillende perspectieven van invloed in de diverse gezinsrelaties leverden geen éénduidige latente factoren op. Gezinnen blijken meer huishoudens van verschil te zijn dan van éénstemmigheid (althans m.b.t. invloed zoals door ons onderzocht). Analyses naar effecten van intentionaliteit en valentie binnen éénzelfde relatie (multivariate variantie analyses) gaven wel significante hoofdeffecten voor intentionaliteit en valentie: intentionele invloed wordt meer beseft dan niet-intentionele invloed, en positieve invloed wordt meer beseft dan negatieve invloed. Kortom, alhoewel gezinsleden verschil maken tussen een besef van intentionele en niet-intentionele invloed, worden beiden vormen van invloedsbesef geconstrueerd door gelijkaardige interpersoonlijke en gezinsfactoren. Hoewel de definitie van invloed (Huston, 2002) impliceert dat mensen hun invloed niet 'bezitten' (men is afhankelijk van de betekenis van zijn/haar effect voor de andere), wordt dit in de betekenisverlening van de gezinsleden niet als dusdanig geconstrueerd. De hypothese dat niet-intentionele invloed meer afhankelijk zou zijn van partner factoren aangezien niet-intentionaliteit interafhankelijkheid impliceert, kon niet bevestigd worden. In een laatste studie werden de schalen toegepast op een klinisch gezin. Hieruit leek dat dit gezin voornamelijk afweek op de intentionele schalen. Op het intentionele terrein wordt de gezinsstrijd uitgevochten, m.a.w. het terrein van de macht. Een klinische consequentie is dat het niet-intentionele terrein mogelijk een opportuun domein is om verandering in het gezinsfunctioneren te initiëren.

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