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**Parenthood in Midlife: Perceived Parental Role,
Intergenerational Ambivalence and Well-Being
among Parents of Adult Children**

Long Abstract

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Abstract

Most adults experience parenthood but the scientific studies of parenthood hold limited knowledge in the significant question of how having and raising children affects parents. The least understood and understudied phase of parenting, is the long middle phase, i.e. the years of parenting when the parents are not yet elderly and their children grow into young adulthood. This research aimed to observe and reveal the association between three research variables: Perceived Parental Role, Intergenerational Ambivalence and Parents' Well-being. The research attempted to broaden our understanding of parents' subjective experiences, perceptions and meanings in regard to their parental role and to explore if and how they are affected by intergenerational ambivalence which, in turn, affects their well-being.

The research population consisted of 60 midlife parents (30 males, 30 females), with ages ranged from 50 to 60 which had at least two biological children, at least one over the age of twenty-five (after completing military service). Both parents and children live in Israel. The research design was a two-phase Mixed Methods design - an explanatory design. With the use of both, quantitative and qualitative research methods.

The quantitative research tools included three questionnaires recognized as valid and reliable: Self-Perceived Parental Role (SPPR) Intergenerational ambivalence and Psychological Well-Being (PWB). The qualitative research tool included semi-structured interviews.

The key quantitative findings revealed significant correlations between the three research variables: Self-Perceived Parental Role (SPPR) was positively significant correlated to Parental Well-being (PWB), inversely correlated with Intergenerational Ambivalence. The qualitative research results implied that there were direct and strong relationships between parents' feelings of ambivalence and their appraisal of their perceived parental role and well-being. The importance of this research is in the enrichment of the existing theoretical knowledge with regard to the general experience of midlife parents and specifically regarding the experience of their parental role. The clarifying of correlations between central components, which characterize midlife parenthood and various aspects of parents' well-being in this stage in life, may potentially contribute to improve parents' quality of life. The indication of the association between the level of intergenerational ambivalence as a built-in attribute of the midlife parental role and aspects of their well-being may promote professional interventions and social programs. The overall familial well-being may improve if potentially problematic contexts will

be detected in advance and coping resources for states of potential stress and crisis will be fostered.

Key words: Midlife; Midlife parenthood; Parental role; Intergenerational ambivalence; Well-being

INTRODUCTION

This study engages in the parental experience, which accompanies most people throughout their life cycle. It focuses on parenting during midlife, which is a relatively long and significant period in the parenting cycle. However its importance has neither received public and research attention, nor been adequately investigated in depth so far. This is the parenting stage when the parents are not in their late adulthood yet, are healthy, and function independently, and at least some of their children are young adults living independently outside the parental home.

The study's aim is to reveal the parents' subjective point of view of their parental experience, specifically their perception of their adult parental role, the sense of ambivalence involved in fulfilling their parental role, and their evaluation of their well-being in this chapter of their lives. These aspects are seen as a derivative and a reflection of their parenthood and the inevitable effects of the broader family and personal contexts.

The examination of parenthood at this life's stage involves two foci. The first relates to the level of the subjective parental experience and the parents' perception of their parental role; the second is manifested in the parents' evaluation and perceptions of the intergenerational relationships with their children in its various aspects. The changes and the maturation processes affect the parent-child relationship at this developmental stage, while these changes are characterized by the unique dynamics the relationship in itself causes the members sense of self.

These two layers interact and feed each other so that simultaneous exploration and consideration of the two aspects can contribute to a "complete" picture of parenting in this life chapter. However, while intergenerational systems and relations have received considerable attention and many studies have focused on this issue, the scarcity of studies exploring the older parents' role is significant. In this study, our objective is to focus on deepening the understanding of the adult parental role, and to give this complex experience its appropriate space.

A review of the findings of major studies that have dealt with intergenerational relations in midlife is imperative for understanding the "stage" and the "background" of the parental role. There are reasonable grounds for assuming that they form a factor that both influences and affected by the perception of the parental role, which is the focus of the current study; however, they do not serve as independent variables in this study. As mentioned above, most of the

studies dealing with the adult parenthood period, in contrast to those on the early parenting period, focus on intergenerational relations and relationships, not on parental roles. In accordance with this trend, the substance of the parental role was overlooked in favor of the nature and quality of the relationship with adult offspring. In the words of Levinstine (2003, p. 629), "in the process of modernization in the Western world, a change has occurred in the family, leading to a shift from social roles to social relations as major properties of the family." A consequence of this trend is that the results of many studies are expressed in terms that reflect relationships as indices, such as frequency and quality of the relationship, etc. Most scholars reject the argument that the parental role has ended at the midlife stage, but there is ambiguity regarding its essence and only a few studies have explored this issue. The existing literature also fails to refer to parents as dependent variables as children grow up, and to how having and raising children affect the parents themselves. There is an extensive emphasis on parent's characteristics and practices as independent variables, while the essence of the parental role and the potential parental influence on their children's development was vastly studied. Therefore, it is desirable to study the effect of the fruit (i.e. adult children) of their parenting efforts. Moreover, many parents see their children's functioning in the world as a reflection of their own advantages or disadvantages, and therefore as a powerful symbolism. For that reason, there is great importance to deepening the study of the parenting experience on the lives of the parents themselves, and its influence on their self-perception and well-being. The trends that characterize the global research literature on parenting in general and during the midlife stage in particular, prevail also in Israel. Studies on the Israeli society or on the family that focus on this period of parenting and on exploring the adult parental role are extremely rare. In opposition to the scarcity of studies on the matter as shown above, the assumption underlying this research is that the parental role continues to exist during parenting in midlife as an integral, long, and complex part of the family life cycle and is going through a process of change and reconstruction.

The researcher is a family psychotherapist that has encountered a large repertoire of families and individuals seeking assistance due to emotional and functional difficulties in confronting issues related to the midlife parental role and the mental consequential needs. These difficulties influence their well-being directly or indirectly. Thus, the need for this research emerged also from the field, in an attempt to understand the possible interaction between subjective parents' perceptions of their parental role, ambivalence and well-being.

Chapter I

LITERATURE REVIEW: MIDLIFE PARENTING, PARENTAL ROLE, INTERGENERATIONAL AMBIVALENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PARENTAL WELL- BEING

I.1. Parenting

One of the most pervading experiences of adult life is parenting. It is classified as a primary developmental task for a person that starts with the birth of his or her firstborn and continues throughout the rest of their life (Cohler & Altergott, 1995). Parenting is a complex experience that is considered difficult, yet rewarding, for the parent. It may influence a person's definition of self in a fundamental way, and change many of his/her life's statuses, whereas a new and obligating status is acquired – becoming a parent, a father or a mother (Nelson, Kushlev & Lyubomirsky, 2014).

Past research found that having children is considered a valuable part of the adult life (Gerson, Berman & Morris, 1991); therefore, by the age of 45, 85% become parents (Child Trends, 2002). Furthermore, 94% of parents reported that despite the difficulties and costs, having children is worthwhile (Martinez et al., 2006), and considered it as the most positive event in their lives (Berntsen, Rubin & Siegler, 2011). Findings from a sample of older adults, including parents and childless adults, indicated that while some childless individuals regretted not having offspring, none of the parents regretted having them (Hattiangadi, Medvec & Gilovich, 1995).

Parents and their children are considered to have a strong mutual bond, in which they serve each other's needs. Parenting is also considered to have both developmental and evolutionary importance, according to many social scientists (Gerson, Berman & Morris, 1991; Kenrick, et al., 2010). The evolutionary theory and the self-determination theory - both suggest explanations to why fundamental human needs may be linked to parenting. A review of theory and empirical evidence in Nelson, Kushlev and Lyubomirsky (2014) suggested several major fundamentals that are realized by having children and were found to impact multiple aspects of parents' lives, from goal providing and a life's purpose, to human needs' satisfaction, inoculating positive emotions into the lives of parents, and inspiring the identity of parents with multiple social roles.

I.1.1. Midlife parenting

As every other stage in life, the midlife stage has social expectations and norms attached to it, and individuals are expected to act accordingly. The historical change in the term has led to a change in the experiences, expectations, roles and resources of those who entered the midlife stage before the second half of the 20th century and after it.

Therefore, in the contemporary modern society, the definition of the midlife parenting stage is also a dynamic and situated construct concerning its meaning in the normative family today. Familial and societal norms have changed tremendously during the years and past unacceptable norms are widespread nowadays. For instance, single-parent families, the definition of childhood and the acceptable age for a child to leave his parents' home, change in socialization values and the way intergenerational relations have changed due to historical and social processes.

The term "midlife" depends on other variables such as social status, gender and changes of roles; therefore, the beginning and the end of the midlife stage are flexible (Farrell & Rosenberg, 1981). There are different definitions of this term, which reflect the variety of methodological approaches, disciplinary orientations, and substantive concerns in the field. The current research follows Blieszner, Mancini and Marek (1996) by defining midlife parenting as a location on the parenting continuum that is not only associated with parental age or with the family life-cycle stage, but rather also considers the intersection between individual development and family experience.

I.1.2. Midlife Parenting in Israel

The Israeli parents of adult children who participated in the present study met one major condition for participating in the study: permanent residence in Israel. Since these parents are part of the Israeli society, they reflect its character, values, and norms. It is reasonable to assume that the structuring of the Israeli society has conscious and subconscious effects on these parents' structuring and experience. In light of the fact that most of the studies concerning parenting and midlife parenting have been conducted mostly in the western and American culture, it is important to address the Israeli social-cultural contexts.

The Israeli society is small but ethnically and religiously diverse, and it includes a unique combination of Middle-Eastern culture and Western culture. Therefore, a review of families in Israel must consider this fact. Mixed family patterns exist, where traditional and modern family styles live alongside one another due to the population variance of an immigration society

(Lavee & Katz, 2003). When studying the Israeli reality, one must refer to the central elements that have a major significance for its people: the reality of militarism, war and conflict; the cultural background that includes the centrality of tradition and religion; the historical background of a once detached minority, such as the Holocaust; the geographical constraints of a small country that also affect family life, due to the physical proximity of its members etc.

I.2. The Intergenerational Relationships – Where Parenting Occurs

Researchers have mentioned that there is a tendency in professional literature to focus on the familial relationship and not on familial roles in later parenting periods (Long & Mancini, 1989). This tendency leaves the expectations of the parental role un-deciphered. The intergenerational relations literature is the product of mostly family sociologists and gerontologists. Researchers have evaluated the connections between generations within the family and have usually focused on three main spheres: patterns of assistance and support, patterns of contacts and relationship quality (Bengtson, 2001; Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Hagestad, 1987; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008; Zarit & Eggebeen, 1995). There is a vast research literature, mostly quantitative, dealing with the relationships between parents and their adult children. The literature suggests that family relations have become less predictable and more flexible, while the boundaries and obligation of the kinship are being redefined (Johnson, 2000), although the instrumental, emotional and social support that the family gives, is still highly central and important.

The parental role obviously cannot be defined outside the context of the adult intergenerational relationship, and this research focused, as mentioned previously, on the role experiences rather than on relational experiences.

I.3. Conceptual Framework for Research on Midlife Parenting

The presentation of research questions in the field of midlife parenting requires looking into perspectives from several research fields involving the development of the individual, dyadic, and wide relations, and the cultural, familial and social context. Following is a review of the key conceptual frameworks that are part of the theoretical landmarks on which this study is based.

I.3.1. The Life Course Perspective

This theory allows researchers to examine the changes of family roles and their influence on different aspects, similar to the goal of the present study. The examination of the life course is based on the notion that human development includes the timing and order of social roles throughout the life cycle (Macmillan & Copher, 2005). Families and their transitions are a key factor in the course of life. The familial status defines various stages in one's life, which derives from the traditional definition of roles, while highlighting the roles' dynamics throughout the life cycle. The definition of life course dynamics is built upon a combination of role transitions and trajectories, and the interrelations between them (Elder, 1985). In this concept, the life course perspective has three key components: roles, role configurations, and pathways. The family roles and their meanings, as part of the course of life, are embedded in the cultural and social context, which provides scripts of the roles and connection between them, as well as the possibilities and limitations for the acquisition and transitions of roles that relate to different resources (Bengtson & Allen, 1993). The research on parenting was deeply influenced by the concept of "linked lives", especially the research on older parents and their adult offspring (Umberson, Pudrovska & Reczek, 2010). Current research clearly shows throughout the life cycle, parents and their children affect each other and it continues on generation after generation (Early, Gregorie & MacDonald, 2002; Greenfield & Marks, 2006; Milkie, Bierman & Schieman, 2008).

I.3.2. Bowen's Systems Theory

Bowen's family systems theory (Bowen, 1966, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) shifted the research focus from pathology, towards what he identified as the habitual patterns of all "human emotional systems." His theory presented eight interrelated concepts. Following is an overview of those, which are relevant to the present research:

I.3.2.1. Emotional Fusion and Differentiation of Self

According to Bowen, different degrees of conflict, or "fusion", in his terms, can be found in every family. In order to achieve harmony inside the system in times of such "fusion," or "lack of differentiation," individual choices need to be put aside. "Differentiation", on the other hand, is the person's autonomous ability to make self-directed choices, while still dedicated and connected emotionally to a relationship system. His family model contributes to understanding of the dynamics of the two opposing forces and their 'contribution' to the presence of intergenerational ambivalence.

1.3.2.2. Triangles

The process of "triangling" is central in Bowen's theory, and he describes it as "the smallest stable relationship unit" (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 135). Triangling occurs when a vulnerable third party is included in a dyad in order to relieve the anxiety within it. According to Bowen, the concept is useful in understanding the origins of the tension. The triangles also tend to reform and replicate themselves across generations.

1.3.2.3. Family Projection Process

The Family Projection Process recounts for the symptoms that develop among children who witnessed and experienced previous familial anxiety about relationships. This "intergenerational projection" happens in all families and its influence might determine which child will become the centre of generational anxiety, and at what point in life this will take place. This is a theoretical perspective that may expand our overview of the complexity of the child–parent relations.

1.3.2.4. Emotional Cut-off

Bowen describes "emotional cut-off" as the ways in which people handle the intensity of the intergenerational fusion. Physical or emotional distance are the ways "cut-offs" are achieved. Bowen emphasized two key terms: "breaking away" from the family and "growing away" from the family. The differentiation process includes "growing away" from the family through the process of achieving independent goals while still recognizing their part in the family system. A "cut-off" is more similar to an escape since it includes the choice of being utterly different from the family.

1.3.2.5. The Multi-Generational Transmission Process

Bowen's concept of multi-generational transmission process refers to the ways in which roles, patterns, positions and themes in a triangle pass down across generations through projection from parent to child. It affects every child differently, depending on the level of triangling they have with their parents. Bowen goes at least three generations back when discussing the presentation of symptoms.

The abovementioned familial model focuses on emotional processes over generations and on individual's differentiation within his or her systemic context. It emphasizes the individual as

a captive of patterns recurring from generation to generation in the family, which have a direct and indirect influence on parenting patterns and intergenerational relationships.

I.4. The Midlife Parental Role

I.4.1. Parenting as a Role

The theoretical perspective of the role must be discussed due to its centrality to the current research. The Role Theory, which is rooted in sociology, highlights behavior characteristics of the individual in society in relation to social position and statuses, for which society has set norms and rules (Biddle, 1986). The term "role" has multiple theoretical definitions.

The literature barely provides insight regarding the role of the parent after his/her child grew up and left home. It is clear that the parental role decreases after the child grows up, but does it necessarily empty the content out of it? In addition, it is worth asking what remains of this role after the child leaves the home to the entire life of the parent?

Nydegger (1986) offered to see the long-term roles as having their own course of life. The changing roles of the parents (and of their children) have no inherent set of characteristics and the midlife parenting is ever dynamic. Role research, following any theoretical perspective, tends to deal with performance, as the central purpose is to explain behaviors, not inaction. It appears therefore that during parenting years there is a decrease in the parental practice, but there is no doubt that parenting has not ended, and continues to be present in the parental experience (Levitzki, 2006, 2009).

I.4.2. Parenting as Part of the Identity

In the study of identity, identity is usually viewed as a role. This view is based on the symbolic interaction theory, which perceives the self as a "product of social interaction" (Roberts & Bengtson, 1993, p. 264). The definition of a person's self reflects his social roles. According to the symbolic interactionism, roles require constant active negotiation of their performer with others in the social situation; therefore, they are subject to constant change (Goffman, 1959; Stryker, 1980). Thoits (1992) claimed that the most central roles are those of the family, and it applies to all age ranges, including to middle-aged adults. The assertion that the status and roles of parents dominates the self-identity of older adults has been validated in a qualitative study conducted by Levitzki (2009) among a sample of parents of adult Israeli children. The concept that was introduced by Nydegger (1991), "parental maturity", describes two important processes: distancing and comprehending. Since the lives of the parents are defined by various

aspects and not only by their parental role, they have to distance themselves from and to accept the change and the decrease in their involvement in their offspring's life. In light of the importance and centrality of the parental role in the parent's identity, it is important to address the processes of the development of the adult identity, since the parental identity is part of it.

I.4.2.1. The Theoretical Models of Adult Identity Development

A possible model to examine the progress of the self in adulthood is a model based on identity conceptualization for self-definition within personality (Whitbourne, 1986, 1996). As stated by this model, identity creates an arranged schema that allows people to interpret their experiences. The model also allows the inference that due to individual experiences, interactions and personal growth, individuals will use accommodation and assimilation differently during adulthood. The ideal state is the identity's dynamic balance between the two processes (Whitbourne & Connolly, 1999). Erikson (1963) presented a psychological model for the life cycle with eight-stages, assuming adulthood necessarily brings about changes. The middle years' stage concentrates on nurturing the next generation and benefiting society or in Erikson's terms - passing on to the future one's creative products (generativity vs. isolation). Research review reveals that the notion of "middle years" and roles as static until old age is gradually changing to a more dynamic and interactive concept (Goffman, 1959; Strauss, 1978) that sees those years and the long term roles as adjustable and versatile (Chappel & Orbach, 1986; Matthews, 1986; Nydegger, 1991). Parenting is an ongoing interactive process, which is defined by an uneven development through the parent's life cycle. When the children are young, the parent's duties and roles are clear, socially constructed and known in advance, while every transformation among the parents are in response to the child's development. However, as children mature, the cultural guidelines are scarce, and still roles develop in order to adjust and find the proper balance between independence and dependence, according to a general consensus that one needs to find the thin line between friendship and parental guarantees. Various perspectives suggest that signs of development toward adulthood and transformations in the parent-child relationship can affect the well-being of midlife parents. While every theory highlights a different working process, they all share the same conclusion: this life's stage might risk the parent's psychological world (Silverberg, 1992 cited in Ryff & Seltzer, 1996).

I.4.2.2. "The Dialectic Field Model" by Levitzki (2006) for the Adult Parental Role

We expand on Levitzki's model because, to the best of our knowledge, it is one of the very few that treats the adult parental role concretely and places the adult parental role at the center.

Levitzki proposed a model called "The Dialectic Field: Balancing Multiple Tensions", which is based on the analysis of the parents' interviews and narratives. It reflects the dynamic process of redefining the parental role in all three terms: personal, interpersonal and familial. Based on this model, the role of the older parent is composed of ever-changing balancing moves against a field of co-dependent tensions caused by the polemic poles - closeness versus distance. The term "closeness" describes the significant involvement parents have in their adult offspring's life, which is based on their acts, motivations and attitudes, in order to maintain close relations with them. The second term, "distance", refers to the conscious and intended act of parents to help their children to create autonomy and independence. This act derives from social and cultural norms that see the separateness of the children as necessary, and push the parents towards that pole, while promising that this deed will help them to find free time to finally invest in themselves. It is simultaneously accompanied with the fear of the possible ramifications to their own life. The model presents two parallel and linked balancing processes: 1) The intra-psychic balancing process, which involves internal experience of the parent, usually manifested in the effort to balance between motivations, attitudes and inclinations. This process is not necessarily extroverted. 2) The process of functional balancing as characterized by the practical side of parenthood. The findings of Levitzki's study show that through their role reconstruction, adult parents experience an internal dialogue between opposing voices that emphasizes their role negotiation: connection vs. separation, family vs. individual values and needs, narcissist reflections, and hierarchy vs. equality. This study adopted Levitzki's conclusions, highlighting the adult parental role as a reconstructing process and the notion that intergenerational ambivalence is integral fragment of adult parenting.

I.5. Prevailing Approaches to the Study of Parenting in Later Life

Social psychologists offer different ways to understand micro-level interpersonal relations and different conceptual frameworks for understanding complex family relationships.

I.5.1. Solidarity Paradigm

The solidarity paradigm was the dominant theory that guided the research in the field of intergenerational relationships, and the dominant model offered for assessing them, especially their emotional aspects, in the past four decades (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Roberts & Bengtson, 1990; Silverstein, Parrott & Bengtson, 1995). The paradigm offers a conceptualization of family relations in adulthood and theorization of the distinctness between parent-child dyads in such relations. It is also a detailed and extensive scheme that systematizes

the six components of intergenerational solidarity: emotional closeness, social contact, geographic distance, supportive behaviors, filial obligations and attitudinal agreement (Bengtson, Biblarz & Roberts, 2002). While the supporters of the solidarity paradigm highlighted mutual support and general agreement upon values, others emphasized isolation, tension, clashes and abuse (Marshall, Hudson & Hodkinson, 1993), relationship discontent, and independence struggles (Cohler & Grunebaum, 1981; George, 1986). Familial character and dynamics can affect the family relations. They may represent both high solidarity and high conflict, or low solidarity and low conflict and they do not depict a single continuum from high solidarity to high conflict.

I.5.2. Solidarity-Conflict Model

In the 1980's, attempts were made to refine the Solidarity Paradigm, resulting in the addition of conflict (or lack thereof) as the seventh principal dimension (Clarke et al., 1999; Parrott & Bengtson, 1999). Bengtson and others claimed that conflict is a normal aspect of family life and it affects the family members' perception of one another and their willingness to assist each other. Conflicts are not necessarily bad. They reflect the fact that some aspects may improve with time and problems will resolve, while other aspects and problems will not.

I.5.3. Intergenerational Ambivalence Approach

Luescher and Pillemer (1998) were the first to deepen the application of the ambivalence concept to the parent-child's relationship. Based on Merton and Barber's (1963) examination, this research contended that the primary source of intergenerational ambivalence is this normative conflict in itself. Lüscher (2003) defined the concept of intergenerational ambivalence and overcame the "solidarity or conflict" simplicity of family relationships. This concept depicts a wider picture of family dynamics. Ambivalence in adult parenting arises due to the children's need of constant support and caring, while facing the cultural pressuring norm for creating distance in the parent-child relationship (Cohler, 1983; Cohler & Altergott, 1995; Moss & Moss, 1992). Cohler and Grunebaum (1981) argued that this ambivalence reflects a paradox in contemporary society: from the one hand, adults aim to psychological and economical independency, and on the other hand, research on family life found that intergenerational dependency is their typical mode (Kiecolt, Balieszner & Savla, 2011). Past research that adopted the solidarity tradition, is blind to this paradox. Therefore, in consistency with Luescher and Pillemer's (1998) findings, the central argument of the current research is that the study of parent-child relations in midlife surpasses the "love-hate relationship." As

Pillemer and Suito (2002) stated, status transitions can clearly reflect intergenerational ambivalence and thus may provide as a “good laboratory” for studying this issue. Some research findings show that several children's characteristics were found to relate to the contribution to intergenerational ambivalence among midlife parents such as children's success or lack of it (Birditt, Fingerman & Zarit, 2010; Fingerman et al., 2006; Pillemer & Suito, 2002); education indicator (Birditt, Fingerman & Zarit, 2010; Pillemer, 2004; Pillemer & Suito, 2002); marital status (Pillemer et al., 2007; Willson et al., 2006); children’s problems (Pillemer et al., 2007). Parent characteristics that may contribute to ambivalent relationships between the parents and their children include gender, marital status, number of living children, socioeconomic status, race, neuroticism and health (Fingerman et al., 2006; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Suito et al., 2006). Our research premise is that ambivalent relationships are a result of ambivalent parental perceptions, stands, and feelings, and vice versa. Parent characteristics that may influence the relationship between the parents and their children include marital status, number of living children, socioeconomic status, race, neuroticism and health (Fingerman et al., 2006; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Suito et al., 2006). Ambivalence is a central key in understanding the relationship between parents and their children. It was found to have a dominant role in the well-being and quality of the relationship (Fingerman et al., 2008; Kiecolt, Blieszner & Savla, 2011; Suito et al., 2011).

I.6. Parental Well-Being

The effects of parenting on the well-being of the individual are a relatively old subject in the social sciences. Scholars who study well-being in adulthood are aware that one of the major expectations socially binding adults is becoming a parent (Havighurst, 1972). Erikson (1959) claims that midlife development includes the experience of being a parent. Numerous sociological survey studies examined the effect of parenthood on psychological well-being (McLanahan & Adams, 1987; Ryff et al., 1994; Scott & Alwin, 1989; Umberson & Gove, 1989). Also in personality psychology, the research focuses greatly on the effect of parenting on personality characteristics, such as efficiency levels, anxiety, control and depression (Sirignano & Lachman, 1985). Early studies mostly focused on the parenting in early years, and middle stage parenthood (when children mature and become young adults, while the parents are still not elderly) was scarcely examined (Lancaster et al., 1987; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Seltzer & Ryff, 1994).

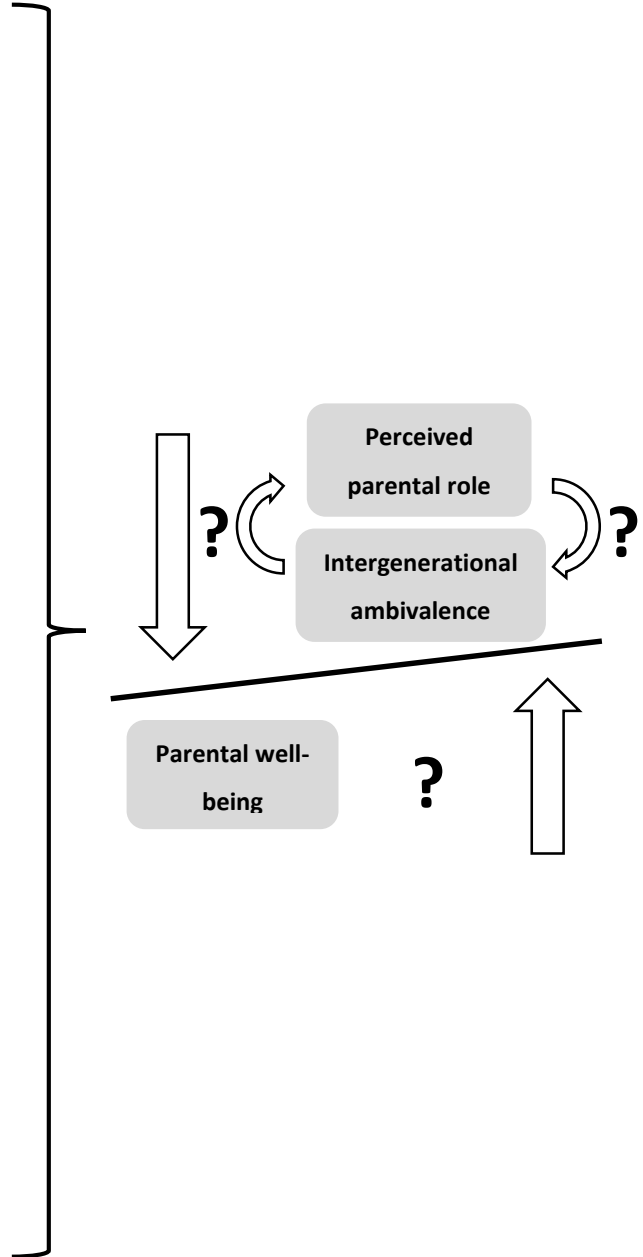
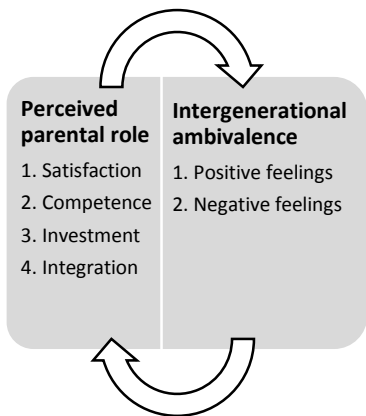
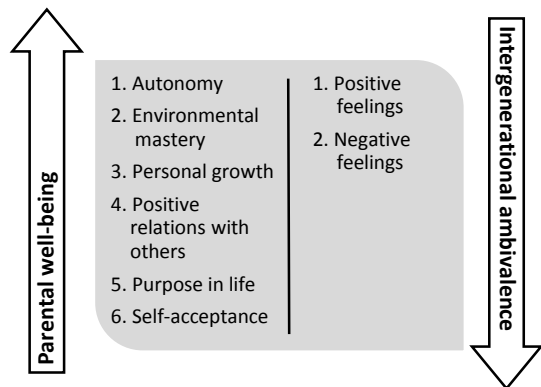
I.6.1. Conceptualizing “Well-Being”

Various theorizations, approaches and measurement methods arose concerning well-being concept (Busseri & Sadava, 2011; Diener et al., 1999). Ryff (1989) suggested another approach to the construct of well-being in a multidimensional model, which includes six distinct components of positive psychological functioning. Ryff’s Scales of Psychological Well-Being seem to be particularly appropriate for assessment of midlife well-being and for this reason was adopted in our research.

Empirical and theoretical studies of ageing families have come to recognize the complexity and multiplicity in the relationships between parents and their adult children (Silverstein & Giarrusso, 2010). Research clearly indicates that both parents and their adult offspring feel mixed ambivalent emotions towards one another (Birditt, Fingerman and Zarit, 2010; Fingerman et al., 2008; Lowenstein, 2007; Pillemer et al., 2007). It was also found that this intergenerational ambivalence was inversely linked to the psychological well-being of parents (Fingerman et al., 2008).

The goal of this study is to explore the linkage between two aspects of the parental experience – the perceived parental role and intergenerational ambivalence – and aspects of parental well-being. Parenting appears to be more relevant to well-being in certain points in the life course than other factors.

Figure 1.I describes the potential interrelation and interaction between the research variables and their sub-scales: Perceived parental role, Intergenerational ambivalence, and parental well-being draws on theory and previous research.



Chapter II

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

II.1. Research Goals

The research goals of this study were to examine variables that were hypothesized to correspond to various aspects of well-being among parents in midlife in the context of their parenthood. Hence, the research goals were:

- 1) To examine the relationships between the perceived parental role, intergenerational ambivalence, and personal well-being among midlife parents.
- 2) To explore the differences between mothers and fathers at midlife in relation to the perceived parental role, intergenerational ambivalence, and personal well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

A research design that contributes to uncovering the associations between variables that are integral parts of the content world of midlife parents may shed light on the phenomenon, add to our understanding of it, and reveal its potential implications on parents' well-being.

II.2. Research Questions

The research questions of this study resulted from its goals and thus the research was designed to answer the following questions:

- 1) What relationships exist between the perceived adult parental role, intergenerational ambivalence, and psychological well-being among midlife parents?
- 2) Are there differences between mothers and fathers in midlife in relation to perceived parental role, intergenerational ambivalence, and psychological well-being?

The study was a mixed methods study and questions were formulated for both the quantitative and qualitative data collection and data analysis.

II.3. Research Hypotheses

The current research is a correlational study based on research in the fields of parental role, intergenerational ambivalence, and well-being in midlife parenthood. The research hypotheses are as follows:

The primary hypothesis: There are significant correlations between parents' role perceptions, their level of intergenerational ambivalence, and aspects of their psychological well-being.

The secondary hypotheses:

- 1) There is a positive relationship between parents' role perceptions (SPPR) and aspects of parents' psychological well-being (PWB) (the higher the perceived parental role the higher the psychological well-being).
- 2) There is a negative relationship between parents' level of intergenerational ambivalence and aspects of psychological well-being (the lower the level of intergenerational ambivalence, the higher the psychological well-being score).
- 3) There are differences between mothers and fathers in the perceived parental role, intergenerational ambivalence, and psychological well-being.

II.4. Research Variables

Variable 1: Perceived parental role, comprising four subscales: Competence, Satisfaction, Investment (Importance), Integration.

Variable 2: Intergenerational Ambivalence: positive qualities: love, support, understanding; negative qualities: conflict, tension, disagreement, too demanding and being criticized.

Variable 3: Personal Well-Being, comprising six subscales: Autonomy, Environmental mastery, Personal growth, Positive relations, Purpose in life, Self-acceptance.

Variable 4: Gender as a moderator variable: mothers/fathers.

II.5. Research Participants

The target sample of this research comprised 60 healthy parents, men and women, living in their own homes with their partners. All the parents lead an independent life without the need for any functional care and maintain active social lives. The participants included in the research sample have at least two biological children, at least one over the age of 25 (after

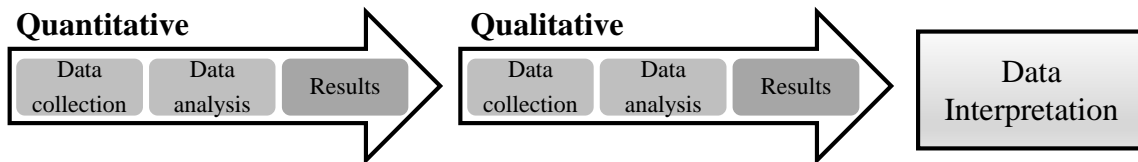
completing military service). Additionally, all the participants' children lead separate and independent lives. Thus, they are either employed or self-employed, self-supporting, and living outside their parents' home. The parents' ages ranged from 50 to 60 years; both parents and children live in Israel. The selection process was directed to maximize the 'control' of the variety range of possible confounding variables notable in accordance with previous research findings, consistent with the empirical literature in the current research field and in correspondence with the research goals. The characteristics of these excluded cases have been found to be predictors of some of the current research variables. In other words, including these cases would have compromised the ability to suggest a conceptual framework in this inductive study. The inclusion criteria were chosen in order to minimize variability and produce a homogeneous sample that allows conceptual understandings to be generated inductively (Gilgun, 2005).

Sampling: In this research, a method of a snowball sampling was applied, which is one type of non-probability sampling (also known as a purposive sampling) (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). Such a procedure allows the researcher to generalize research data to the entire population of midlife parents (Patton, 2001; Merriam, 2009). Participants were asked to consent to their participation in the research and signed a consent form (following *informed consent code*). Because the research questions in the present study did not involve within-family processes, one focal adult child from each family was randomly selected by the participant parent to whom he/she was related in the data collection of both phases of the research. The parents in the sample were asked to complete a demographic form. All the participants' characteristics were coded for the data analyses.

II.6. Research Paradigm

A mixed-methods approach was utilized in this research, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The design was suitable for the purpose of a thorough examination of the well-being of parents in midlife in the context of their parenthood and with relation to their perceptions of parenting and their existing level of intergenerational ambivalence. The data were 'mixed' such that, together, the quantitative and qualitative data formed a more complete picture than either one standing alone (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

Figure 1.II. Mixed Methods Design - Explanatory Design scheme. The arrows indicate a progressive form of data collection, where one form (qualitative data) follows the other (quantitative data) (Creswell, 2009).



II.7. Research Tools

The data collection was based on two methods. The four variables in this study were evaluated by administering questionnaires and conducting semi-constructed interviews with part of the sample participants.

II.7.1. Quantitative Tools

Quantitative research methods were used in the first phase of the study, where three questionnaires were administered to the participants: Self-Perceptions of the Parental Role Scale (SPPR) (MacPhee, Benson & Bullock, 1996), the Intergenerational Ambivalence (Elder, Robertson & Conger, 1996) scale, and the Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) (Morozink et al., 2010; Ryff, 1989). All three questionnaires utilized in the current research were translated into Hebrew.

II.7.2. Qualitative Tools

Semi-structured interviews were administrated with some parents out of the sample. The aim of qualitative research is to understand the researched phenomena as it is understood by the participants, and its goal is to come as close as possible to the unique construction of the participants' world, as perceived and experienced by the participants themselves (Shkedi, 2005). Researchers using the qualitative method reach their conclusions in a dynamic, continuous, and methodical process of gathering data and analyzing them. The researcher has chosen a qualitative research tool to observe the parents' subjective perceptions of their parental experience and their perceived adult parental role, the sense of ambivalence involved in fulfilling their parental role, and their well-being, in this chapter of their lives.

II.8. Research Procedures

In this study, a two-phase design enabled a better understanding of the relationships between the research variables and differences across gender.

Stage 1 - Quantitative approach and tools: The three questionnaires were administered to the parents' sample. The parents completed the three questionnaires independently.

Stage 2 - Qualitative research and tool: In the second phase, 12 volunteer parents from the research sample participated in a semi-structured interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

II.9. Data Analysis

Each tool was presented and analyzed according to the research method and approach.

Questionnaires

- a) The reliability of each questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's alpha for each subscale and for the entire questionnaire.
- b) Pearson correlations were used to test the associations between the questionnaires and their subscales.
- c) Independent samples T-tests were used to reveal significant differences between men and women in the context of each studied variable and sub-scales separately.

Interviews

The strategy chosen for this research was to examine multiple case studies (Yin, 1984). The combined analyses of these cases yield common categories, which enables a comparison between the cases and allows insights into the studied phenomenon. The data were analyzed by a computer program for narrative data analysis, the Narralyzer Program (Shkedi, 2014), which allowed transparency and control. The data analysis was based on thematic analysis, which focuses on what the participants say, describe, and explain. Systematic and transparent analysis was performed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in continuous stages, including open coding and categorical mapping, which emphasized the themes common to all the parents of adult children as well as their individual stances and attitudes.

II.10. Ethical Procedures

In the current research, regulatory codes of research practice were followed strictly. The participants were informed by the researcher about the research theme and how information would be shared and used (following *voluntarism, full information, and comprehension codes*).

The participants' names were not disclosed and only the first letter of their first name was recorded. Completed questionnaires were coded by numbers assigned to each parent (following *privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality codes*).

Table 1.II. Summary of research design, methodology, and research procedure

Research Question	Approach and Tools	Data Analysis	The Aim
<p>Quantitative questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What relationships exist between the perceived adult parental role, intergenerational ambivalence, and psychological well-being among midlife parents? 2. Are there differences between mothers and fathers in midlife in relation to perceived parental role, intergenerational ambivalence, and psychological well-being? 	<p>Mix-Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative tools.</p> <p>Quantitative Questionnaires:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-perceived parental role - <i>SPPR</i> (elaborated by MacPhee, Benson & Bullock, 1986) ▪ Intergenerational Ambivalence (elaborated by Elder, Robertson & Conger, 1996) ▪ Psychological Well-Being - <i>PWB</i> (elaborated by Ryff, 1989 & Morozink et al., 2010) <p>(The three adopted questionnaires are recognized, valid and reliable, and were translated into Hebrew for the purpose of this research)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Questionnaires' reliability tested by Cronbach's alpha for each component and for the entire instrument. ▪ Questionnaires' validity tested by inter-correlations among items in each questionnaire. 	<p>Quantitative research would reflect potential associations between variables and existing differences between genders amongst these variables. It would enable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Examination of relationship between three variables ▪ Statistical comparison across gender among the three questionnaires ▪ Generalization from the research midlife parents sample to the general midlife parents population
<p>The Research Hypotheses</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There are relationships between parents' role perceptions, their level 		<p>Analysis of research questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pearson correlations were conducted amongst three variables and between 	

<p>of intergenerational ambivalence, and aspects of their well-being.</p> <p>a. There is a positive relationship between parents' role perceptions (SPPR) and aspects of parents' well-being (PWB).</p> <p>b. There is a negative relationship between parents' level of intergenerational ambivalence and aspects of well-being, (the lower the level of intergenerational ambivalence, the higher the well-being score).</p> <p>2. There are differences between mothers and fathers in perceived parental role, intergenerational ambivalence, and well-being.</p>		<p>sub-scales of each variable to examine the relationships between perceived parental role, level of intergenerational ambivalence, and aspects of parental well-being.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Independent sample <i>t</i>-test was conducted to reveal differences across gender amongst the three research variables (mentioned above). 	
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Research Question	Approach and Tools	Data Analysis	The Aim
	<p>A multivariate analysis (MANOVA) was also conducted for the observation of across gender differences. The indication of significant gender effect (differences between genders) required a Test of Between-Subjects Effects to be conducted for the purpose of assessing the source of the differences.</p>		
<p>Qualitative Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do midlife parents describe/perceive their parental role, intergenerational ambivalence, and psychological well-being? 2. What differences exist in their perceptions/descriptions of these domains across gender among midlife parents? 	<p>Qualitative: Semi-structured Interview:</p> <p>Included ten focus pre-determined, open-ended questions and one open question. The questions were originally edited by the researcher for the purpose of this research (key aspects were derived from the major findings of the quantitative questionnaires applied in phase one of the research).</p>	<p>Data Analysis in this research was conducted via content analysis based on methodology that is partly based on the data.</p> <p>Theory-driven thematic analysis is particularly useful when the researcher has a set of theoretical concepts (Sullivan, Gibson & Riley, 2012) as in this research. The purpose of the analysis is to identify common and selective themes presented by interviewees.</p>	<p>Qualitative research would allow understanding of the stances, attitudes, and feelings of parents concerning the three research variables.</p>
<p><i>Note</i> Ethical codes: informed consent, discretion, anonymity and privacy, were followed throughout the entire research procedure</p>			

Chapter III

RESEARCH FINDINGS PERTAINING TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This chapter presents the final research findings pertaining to the research questions and hypotheses.

III.1. Quantitative findings – research question no. 1, primary and secondary hypotheses

The first research question was “**What relationships exist between the perceived adult parental role, intergenerational ambivalence, and psychological well-being among midlife parents?**”

The general research hypothesis comprised of two secondary parts and claimed the following:

A) There is a positive relationship between parents’ role perceptions (SPPR) and aspects of parents’ psychological well-being (PWB).

B) There is a negative relationship between parents’ level of intergenerational ambivalence and aspects of psychological well-being (the lower the level of intergenerational ambivalence, the higher well-being score).

In order to examine the research hypotheses, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between the study's variables and their corresponding subscales.

Table 1.III presents the Pearson correlation results between all study variables

Table 1.III. Pearson correlations between all research variables (N = 60)

	SPPR	PWB	P	N	CRM	SIM
SPPR	—	0.480 ***	0.630 ***	-0.392 **	-0.268 *	-0.361 **
PWB		—	0.344 **	-0.427 ***	-0.301 *	-0.308 *
P			—	-0.512 ***	-0.359 **	-0.532 ***
N				—	0.921 ***	0.895 ***
CRM					—	0.974 ***
SIM						—

p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

SPPR = self-perceptions of the parental role; PWB = psychological well-being; P = positive aspects of ambivalence ; N = negative aspects of ambivalence; CRM = conflicting reactions model score; SIM = similarity-intensity model score

In order to provide a better reading of the correlations between the research variables and subscales, additional correlations were carried out: correlation matrix of the six subscales of well-being (PWB) and the four subscales of perceived parental role (SPPR), correlation matrix of the aspects of well-being and intergenerational ambivalence measures, correlation matrix of the aspects of perceived parental role (SPPR) and intergenerational ambivalence measures. To summarize the key quantitative research findings in relation to the research hypotheses, significant correlations were found between the study variables and their subscales, which are displayed, in the final table 5.II in this chapter.

III. 2. Quantitative findings – research question no.2 and secondary hypothesis

The second research question was “**Are there differences between mothers and fathers in midlife in relation to perceived parental role, intergenerational ambivalence, and psychological well-being?**”

According to the secondary hypothesis, differences will be found between mothers and fathers in perceived parental role, intergenerational ambivalence and psychological well-being. In order to test this hypothesis, independent samples T-tests were conducted between mothers and fathers for each of the study variables and their corresponding subscales.

Table 2.III. T-tests between mothers and fathers for each of the study variables

	t	df	p	Mean Difference	SE Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
SPPR	-0.104	58	0.918	-0.016	0.151	-0.319	0.288
PWB	0.180	58	0.858	^a 0.028	0.156	-0.283	0.339
P	-0.314	58	0.755	-0.044	0.142	-0.328	0.239
N	1.227	58	0.225	0.211	0.172	-0.133	0.555
CRM	1.355	58	0.181	^a 0.400	0.295	-0.191	0.991
SIM	1.276	58	0.207	^a 0.317	0.248	-0.180	0.813

Note. All tests, variances of groups assumed equal

^a Levene's test is significant ($p < .05$), suggesting a violation of the equal variance assumption. SPPR = self-perceptions of the parental role; PWB = psychological well-being; P = positive aspects of ambivalence; N = negative aspects of ambivalence; CRM = conflicting reactions model score; SIM = similarity-intensity model score

According to independent samples T-tests, there were no significant differences between mothers ($N = 30$) and fathers ($N = 30$) for any of the study variables' total scores. A further examination of the study variables' individual subscales revealed some significant differences in scores across gender in some of the study variables. In order to provide a better reading of the unique differences between mothers and fathers in relation to the study variables, additional correlations were carried out separately among mothers and fathers: correlation matrix of perceived parental role and psychological well-being; correlation matrix of perceived parental role and ambivalence; correlation matrix of psychological well-being and ambivalence. The findings revealed differences in the sub-scales of the variable perceived parental role. Multivariate tests of MANOVA indicated a significant gender effect (differences between genders).

The following table indicates the source of the differences.

Table 3.III. Correlation matrix of perceived parental role subscales

	SPPR satisfaction	SPPR competence	SPPR integration	SPPR investment
SPPR satisfaction	—	0.437 ***	0.686 ***	-0.171
SPPR competence		—	0.364 **	-0.435 ***
SPPR integration			—	-0.187
SPPR investment				—

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

The source of the differences is in the *investment* sub-scale, which contributes a negative correlation ($r = -0.435, p < .001$). Differences were found also in another variable sub-scale of psychological well-being. Tests of between-subjects effects revealed that the source of the differences is in the *growth* sub-scale (females tend to report greater growth). In the variable ambivalence, no significant differences were found between genders in the average scores. Significant differences between men and women, and gender-specific correlations are displayed in the final table 5.II in this chapter.

III.3. Qualitative findings – two research questions and hypotheses

This research study examined two major questions that were analyzed by a quantitative approach and the analysis results were presented above. This section presents the findings regarding these questions with the focus on the specific sub scales of the research variables between which, in the first stage of this research, a significant correlation was found and the differences across gender. The interviewees were asked to relate and elaborate on their personal attitudes and positions concerning the three major issues: **(A) the adult parental role; (B) ambivalence toward the adult child; and (C) parent's well-being.**

Using the data content analysis, we can sum the noticeable and significant tendencies of the findings in accordance with the themes raised by the parents. The findings are presented as a

content analysis of the participants' interviews regarding: **(A) the essence of the parental role of the adult child; (B) ambivalence toward the adult child; and (C) parent's well-being.** We present the major themes in each of the three aspects.

Table 4. III Summary of key features raised by **fathers** and **mothers** in the interviews by content analysis

A. The adult parental role	Nature of the parental role	A.1 Emotional support	✓ (3)	✓ (4)	
		Satisfaction derived from parental role	A.2.1 Full satisfaction	✓ (4)	✓ (5)
	A.2.2 Imbalance between parent's desire to give and the readiness of their children to receive from them		✓ (2)		
	Extant of role investment (=importance)	Evaluation of competence in fulfilling the parental role	A.3.1 Engaging in endless and continuous investment	✓ (3)	
			A.3.2 Partial investment for various reasons		✓ (2)
			A.3.3 Controlled investment for various reasons	✓ (1)	✓ (2)
			A.3.4 Less investment compared to the young child parental role		✓ (3)
	Integrating the parental role parallel to other roles	A.4 Good competence	✓ (4)	✓ (4)	
		Integrating the parental role parallel to other roles	A.5.1 An integral part	✓ (3)	✓ (4)
			A.5.2 As top priority	✓ (3)	✓ (2)

B. Ambivalence towards the adult child
This domain was composed of its two polar aspects

Conflicts, tension, and disputes with an adult child	Adult children's appreciation, care and love for their parents	B.1.1 Child's interest in them	✓(3)	✓(3)
		B.1.2 Child is consulting with them	✓(3)	✓(4)
		B.1.3 His/her showing of concern	✓(5)	✓(4)
		B.1.4 Providing feed-back to them	✓(2)	✓(5)
		B.1.5 Appreciation to them	✓(3)	✓(3)
		B.1.6 Non-verbal expressions from child's side	✓(6)	✓(5)
		B.2.1 Existence of harmony and mutual respect	✓(3)	✓(2)
		B.2.2 Involvement but not intervention in child's life	✓(4)	✓(4)

C. Parent's well-being

The effect of ambivalence on parent's well-being	Environmental mastery	C.1 Always true and in all areas	✓(3)	✓(5)
		C.2 Full sense of mastery	✓(4)	✓(4)
	Personal growth in general and in specific areas of life	C.3.1 Direct and permanent impact	✓(4)	✓(2)
		C.3.2 A great effect produces constant anxiety	✓(4)	✓(4)
		C.3.3 The child's well-being is reflected in the parent's well-being	✓(2)	✓(4)
		C.3.4 A significant factor	✓(4)	✓(4)

III.4. Summary of quantitative and qualitative findings

The following table finalizes the quantitative and qualitative research findings

Table 5.III. Summary of quantitative and qualitative research findings

Key Quantitative Findings	Key Qualitative Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A positive and significant correlation between Personal well-being and Perceived parental role • Inverse correlation between Personal well-being and Intergenerational ambivalence (measured by CRM-conflicting reaction model); positive correlation with Positive dimension (ambivalence aspect) and negative correlation with Negative dimension (ambivalence aspect). • Perceived parental role is inversely correlated with intergenerational ambivalence (measured by CRM-conflicting reaction model); positive correlation with Positive dimension and negative correlation with Negative dimension (two aspects of ambivalence). • No significant differences were found for Intergenerational ambivalence (measured by CRM-conflicting reaction model) between genders • Positive and significant correlation between Personal well-being and Perceived parental role among males; the correlation among females is not significant. • Non-significant correlation between Personal well-being and intergenerational ambivalence (measured by CRM-conflicting reaction model) among males, and a correlation with marginal significance among females • Among males, Personal well-being correlations with Positive and Negative dimensions of intergenerational ambivalence are significant, while among females, these correlations show a similar direction but are non-significant • Perceived parental role and CRM (conflicting reaction model-aspect of ambivalence) correlation is significant neither among males nor among females • Among males perceived parental role and positive dimension of intergenerational ambivalence are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most parents emphasized the importance of emotional support for their adult children as the essence of the parental role • Most parents, men and women alike, were fully satisfied with their performance as parents • Men highlighted more investment in their children's lives, while women tended to report partial investment, and more precise and more discerned investing roles • Most parents, men and women alike, evaluate their parenting competence as good • Most parents, men and women alike, feel they are appreciated by their children • Mixed attitudes were found regarding current tensions between the parents and their children • Most parents, men and women alike, experience personal growth today • Most parents, men and women alike, feel some sense of mastery, sometimes in spite of difficulties and variations in different aspects of life • Parents sayings imply that there is a direct and strong relationship

positively and significantly correlated, while among females the correlation is much stronger. While Perceived parental role and negative dimension of intergenerational ambivalence among males are inversely correlated, this correlation turns out to be negative as well, but non-significant among females

between feelings of ambivalence and their well-being

Table 6.III. Summary of qualitative research findings of correlations between study variables and their subscales and differences between genders and gender-specific correlation

Significant correlations between study variables and their subscales	Significant differences between Men and Women, and gender-specific correlations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant Positive correlations were found between the personal well-being and three of the Perceived parental role subscales (<i>satisfaction, competence, and integration</i>) • Positive dimensions predict more positive ratings of Personal well-being and Perceived parental role, according to separate Pearson correlations, or vice versa • Negative dimensions predict more negative ratings of Personal well-being and Perceived parental role, according to separate Pearson correlations, or vice versa. • Higher total ratings of CRM (conflicting reaction) and SIM (similarity and intensity) models of Intergenerational Ambivalence predict negative ratings of Personal well-being and Perceived parental role, according to separate Pearson correlations, or vice versa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women scored higher than men on the Perceived parental role <i>investment</i> scale • Women scored higher than men on the Personal well-being <i>personal growth</i> scale. • For women, a negative correlation was found between the Personal well-being subscale <i>positive relations with others</i> and measures of intergenerational ambivalence, while for men, similar correlations were found for the Personal well-being subscales <i>mastery, autonomy, and self-acceptance</i>. • For women, positive correlations were found between three of the Perceived parental role subscales (<i>satisfaction, competence, and integration</i>) and the positive dimension of ambivalence whereas for men, only the <i>competence</i> subscale showed a significant correlation • For men, multiple significant correlation were found between the Perceived parental role and Personal well-being subscales, whereas for women, only one significant correlation arose.

Chapter IV

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the study's conclusions will be brought.

IV.1. Factual Conclusions

On the factual level, the evidence presented in this research shows the following answers to the research questions and hypotheses:

Relating to the first research question (**what relationships exist between the perceived adult parental role, intergenerational ambivalence and psychological well-being among midlife parents?**), the research findings indicate the presence of connections between the three study variables. A negative connection was found between the perceived personal role and the intergenerational ambivalence. A negative connection was found between the intergenerational ambivalence and the personal well-being, and a positive connection was found between the perceived parental role and the personal well-being variable. These findings are in accordance with the general current research hypothesis, which predicted the relationships between the three research variables and the directions that were found among them.

Relating to the second research question (**are there differences between mothers and fathers in midlife in relation to perceived parental role, intergenerational ambivalence and psychological well-being?**), the research findings indicate lack of variance between the genders in each one of the three study variables: personal parental role, intergenerational ambivalence and psychological well-being.

Differences were found between mothers and fathers in subscales of the two study variables. In the variable, perceived parental role, in the subscale *investment*, the mothers indicated higher levels than the fathers and in the variable, psychological well-being, in the subscale of *self-growth*, the same trend stood out. These findings are opposed to the current secondary hypothesis, which predicted differences between the three research variables across gender.

IV.2. Conceptual Conclusions

On the conceptual level, the findings of this research indicate a strong positive connection between the level of intergenerational ambivalence among all the parents and their assessment of their psychological well-being. It is possible to conclude that parents of adult children in the

midlife stage ascribe central significance to the parental role, and hence their assessment of their psychological well-being derives from and is influenced by their self-esteem about this role and the feelings and emotions accompanying its realization. At a certain level of feasibility (and relying on the words of the parents out of the interviews), it is possible to conclude that high levels of conflicting emotions towards the parental role and towards their children had a negative influence on their assessment of their psychological well-being.

As to this finding, it is worth noting that among all the research participants a low level of intergenerational ambivalence was found, without difference or gaps between mothers and fathers in this chapter of midlife. Likewise, all the parents reported high levels of psychological well-being over the six measures, which this variable in the current study, contained. It is possible to conclude out of these findings that there is no difference between mothers and findings of adult children in midlife in the measures of ambivalence and psychological well-being. Hence, it is possible to assess the significant portion, which the parental role takes in the ensemble of the assessment of psychological well-being of all the parents in midlife. Its power is apparent by comparison to the other different components also contributing significantly to the overall psychological well-being in this chapter in the life of the parents.

An additional prominent conclusion in this study is the declared and explicit reference of the decisive majority of mothers among the parents, and their high appraisal in the self-growth subscale in the measure of the psychological well-being, which was tested in this study. The mothers expressed feeling and desire for self-realization and a search for new fields of development and learning. Hence, it is possible to conclude that at this stage of the parenting this subject of independence, personal growth and self-development is relevant and central to mothers.

On the subject of investment, which was tested as a subscale in the measure of perceived parental role, the study's conclusion is that the sampled fathers expressed high levels of a feeling of prolonged and intensive investment in their adult parental role, and hereby expressed mainly mental investment of constant concern and conceptual investment in the escort of their adult children in their independent life. An expression whose principal is around the being of the parent and which stands out in contrast to the young parental role once fulfilled. As it arises from the testimony of the fathers themselves, it is in contrast to the lower practical involvement, which characterized their young parenting.

IV.3. Practical Implications

The finding of the current study can outline ways of assessment and involvement of educators and treatment of parents in midlife, for adult children and for the family unit at this stage of the life cycle. A theoretical and practical need exists for recognition of the processes involved in development and change in parenting of young children by contrast to parenting of adult children. Transparency, recognition and prior deployment towards this chapter in the life of the parent and the family can help and facilitate mainly the parent, and in parallel, his adult children and all his family.

The findings of the study can contribute to a reduction of the vagueness prevailing as to the parental roles for adult children in society. At this stage of life, complex expectations are placed on the shoulders of the parents from many different sources, deriving also from social norms with which they should cope. An understanding of the personal processes involved in reconstruction of their parental role, in their adaptation to the changing needs of themselves and of their children, enables a prior deployment to crisis points over the continuum of the process. It is possible to equip the parents and adult children with knowledge and tools towards and due to a potential or existing crisis and hereby to contribute to their quality of life and that of their family. In continuation of the findings of this study it seems that it is desirable in the study field to delve into and investigate the adult parent's well-being and its connection to the perception of the role at this stage of life, in continuation and similar to the development of Levitzki's model (2006, 2009), which exposed the structuring process of the parental role out of the words of the parents themselves.

Through systematic study and attention to these processes, we may broaden our understanding of the connection and implications of parenthood and parents' well-being. This in addition to acceptable methods, which exist in the research literature investigating the well-being of parents by comparison to adults without parents, during a process of their becoming parents and in their general feeling when they are occupied with parental activities by contrast to other activities (Nelson, Kushlev & Lyubomirsky, 2014).

Likewise, it is recommended to make use of a wide and multi-dimensional measurement tool of well-being, similarly to the Ryff's tool, which was implemented in this study (1989, 2014), enabling a profound and a comprehensive investigation of the variable and its implications on the parent's life quality.

IV.4. Research Innovations - Contribution to Knowledge

This sub chapter discusses the research innovations and contribution to knowledge in several aspects: In the research topic, research population and in its new insights. Many studies deal with parenting and its implications, mainly in young and old parenting, by comparison to a minority of studies dealing with parenting in the midlife chapter. The uniqueness of this study is in its occupation with this parenting chapter and thereby it contributes to knowledge about parents of adult children the midlife stage.

The current study focuses on the parental role and on the connection of the perception of this role to the psychological well-being of the parent, a subject with which only a few studies deal with. Therefore, the sample of the current study is unique and derived from its goals. Intervening variables, which were found in previous studies as predictors of well-being, like a physical, or a mental disability of a parent or an adult child, did not enter the sample to begin with. Therefore, the research sample is concerned of normative and representative subjects.

The central insights in the study are that the parental role is 'for life' and that it undergoes changes in the transition from young parenting to parenting of adult children, in compatibility with Levitzki's findings (2006, 2009). The parental role continues to be most central in the self-perception of the parent, and the parent ascribes a deep meaning to it also when his children become independent and have families of their own. A reduction is apparent in the practical intensiveness of realization of the parental role but not in the intensiveness of the thinking, the worry and occupation with the role. In this sense, a deliberate sacrifice of the parent for the sake of his children, their future and their good, stood out on every given moment at a sweeping level of altruism, and the question arises whether it contributes to the personal well-being of the parents?

The trend stood out that parents are invested in their children much beyond the power, which their adult children invested in them, in compatibility with the developmental stake hypothesis (Gariusso, Stallings & Bengtson, 1995; Shapiro, 2004). The findings of the study show a difference in family patterns deriving from the abundance of factors, which can be explained from personal, economic and social background factors, which build every family as a specific emotional system with unique characteristics (Bowen 1966, 1978). Characterization of the general parenting pattern was similar with all the families and repeated itself. It seems that at the moment that they became parents, the role accompanies them forever in deeds and thinking throughout the years, an emotional dependence develops upon the parenthood role. Whilst

young parenting was characterized by dependence of the children on their parents in satisfaction of all the essential needs to their growth and development in all the fields, adult parenting is characterized by mental dependence of the parents on their children and their life events implications on parents' life. This includes independent and functioning parents who do not need support or help of their children. Our finding points to the importance of linked lives (Greenfield & Marks, 2006). Much involvement is apparent of the parents in their children's lives and in parallel, a direct and powerful influence was stamped of events of the adult children's lives on the personal psychological well-being of the parents. That is, the parents tended to appropriate successes/failures of their children as if they were their own. Beyond this, the personal psychological well-being of the children penetrated directly to the "utility" of their parents. In other words, the parents were happy that their children were happy and suffered whilst their children suffered (Kalmijn & Degraaf, 2012).

Moreover, parents tend to view their offspring as extensions of themselves (Levitzki, 2009). This phenomenon characterized the absolute majority of the parents and was not stipulated on their grasp of liberal or more traditional opinions as to parenting and the growth of their children. From the very fact that the parents provided and escorted the process of socialization of their children, they felt that they were "responsible" for how their children turn out as adults (Ryff, et al., 1994). It was found that this fact made it difficult for the parents to separate between their needs and the needs of their adult children.

In this study the parental experience was not characterized by high levels of ambivalence, but in the processes of internal bargaining among the parent himself between the pole of proximity and involvement and the pole of distance and giving independence to his/her adult child, a process which strove for balance and self-acceptance (Levitzki, 2009).

This research contribution to knowledge is significant in the following dimensions:

- 1) The parental role continues to stand at the head of the pyramid of needs of the adult in midlife;
- 2) The perception of the parental role is connected to the personal psychological well-being of the parent in midlife;
- 3) Negligible differences exist between mothers and fathers in midlife in the perception of the role and in personal psychological well-being.

The contribution of this study to knowledge is universal and it has the power to be a basis for insights also for populations in other countries and in different cultures. The universal

importance of the current study lies at the basis of the central insight that parenting of adult children is characterized by the fact that children continue to occupy their parents on a daily basis with concern and thinking about them, but in reduction of the practical visibility of realization of the parental role, and it is different in its goals and application from parenting of young children.

IV.5. Research Limitations

This chapter elaborates on three main potential biases in the research. Birenbaum (1993) deals with three types of characteristic biases in research of which the researcher must be aware also at the first stages of planning the research array, and to act successfully and consciously in order to limit them in advance. These limitations are divided into three main types: 1) Limitations related to the research participants:

There is evidence in the research literature as to a tendency of subjects to mark medium values in a quantitative questionnaire, by choice of the middle value over a scale, which enables an even number of answering options (Birnbaum, 1993). The researcher acted to reduce this limitation in the quantitative study tools, which were implemented in this study. Out of preliminary awareness to the potential limitation phenomenon of social desirability, a research array, which combines two types of quantitative and qualitative research tools, was planned. At the first stage of the study, data were collected by means of quantitative questionnaires, which concerned each one of the current study's variables.

The second stage of the research consisted of semi-structured individual interviews, which were held with each one of the interviewees about the study's variables. Hereby the researcher insisted on methodological triangulation by checking data collected via two different methods: questionnaires and interviews. The use of different methods to study a phenomenon lead to greater validity than a single methodological approach and prompts in researchers a more critical stance towards their data.

It bears a few other advantages: it contributes to an increase of the researcher's confidence in the data interpretation, has the potential of expanding meaning-making balance interpretation and guards against the researcher's subjectivity which reduces the chances that any consistent findings are attributable to similarities of methods (as explained in details in Chapter II.6. p. 87). In the findings chapter (chapter III, pp. 108-143), the findings from the two sources were analyzed and united with the goal of validating the study's findings and reducing, as far

as possible, the potential limitation of social desirability in the framework of holding the interviews.

2) Limitations related to the research tools:

With the goal of reducing potential biases connected to the study tools, the researcher conducted a pilot study as a preliminary stage, prior to the implementation of the questionnaires for the parents' study sample. The questionnaires were delivered to 10 subjects who were selected at random with the goal of examining the level of understanding of the subjects of the questionnaires and their compatibility with the local culture in which the study was executed. The researcher adopted the main feedback from the comments and reactions of the subjects of the pilot research.

Likewise, the researcher executed validation of specialists by three professionals from the field of occupation of the study. Following and according to the comments of the specialists, light corrections were executed in the formulations of the items with the goal of improving the research tools.

In order to give double validity, Cronbach's alpha tests were executed for each one of the questionnaires. The final values of Cronbach's alpha in each one of the three questionnaires are above 0.657, hence the study's questionnaires have sufficient reliability and hereby potential biases are prevented in the study's findings and in their interpretation.

3) Limitations related to the researcher:

An additional potential bias with which Birnbaum (1993) deals is the researcher's involvement in the study. The research reduced this bias by carefully clinging to the words of the interviewees and with precise documentation of their words and interviews' content. All the interviews were recorded in full. At the stage of content analysis of the data, and out of awareness of such research biases in this phase, the researcher brought the findings of interviews in combination with the words of the interviewees literally and in their authentic quotation.

In addition, the semi-structured interviews, which were held by the researcher herself, contained open questions with the goal of making possible wide and varied free expression of feelings, thoughts and opinions, positions and dilemmas for all the subjects without any intervention or guidance on the part of the researcher.

IV.6. Further Research

In the light of the literature review, the analyses of the findings and the conclusions of the study, there is a need for a further study on the following subjects:

- 1) On the subject of the perception of the adult parental role: due to the small number of studies in the field and the small number of quantitative study tools adapted to parents of adult children, there is a place to continue and investigate the issue, mainly by means of mixed method approach: quantitative and qualitative which will enable to expand and deepen the spectrum about the adult parental role and to develop study tools adapted to adult parenting.
- 2) On the subject of intergenerational ambivalence, a task for future research is to further develop and study measures of ambivalence. On the background of divided opinions of the researchers in the field as to whether the quantitative study tool and direct and indirect measures are capturing the same phenomenon (Suitor, Gilligan & Pillemer, 2011). Thus, it is important to choose carefully which one to employ, because it is likely that there are contexts in which one measure is better suited than the other is. In addition, based upon the research goal, the adult children's perspective toward their parents should be taken into consideration as well, with the aim of obtaining a wider perspective of an adult parent-child dyad.
- 3) Concerning personal psychological well-being: it is recommended that in families with more than one grown child there is importance in considering the influence of multiple children in a family on the parental psychological well-being (Ward, 2008), in the light of research evidence pointing to the existence of cumulative influence of all the adult children on the well-being of their parents. Furthermore, in the light of the complexity of the personal psychological well-being variable there is space to isolate and unite the variables found in studies as mediators of well-being, in order to enable clearer understanding of cause-result relations.

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