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UNDERSTANDING THE DUAL NATURE OF AMBIVALENCE: WHY AND WHEN AMBIVALENCE LEADS TO GOOD AND BAD OUTCOMES

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

INTRODUCTION

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

That ambivalence is pervasive in organizations is not surprising given that organizational members are constantly balancing contradictory demands within their work relationships, work groups, and broader organizational environments that should give rise to ambivalent experiences [see Ashforth, Rogers, Pratt, and Pradies (2014) for a review]. At the interpersonal level, people have complex relationships with colleagues (Zho & Ingram, 2013), protégés (Eby, Butts, Durley, and Ragins, 2010), customers (Pratt & Doucet, 2000), bosses (Pratt & Doucet, 2000), and negotiation partners (Rothman,

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2011). For instance, workers navigate overbearing but caring managers (Duffy, Ganster, and Pagon, 2002), and friendships with colleagues that are sometimes also competitive (Ingram & Zou, 2008; Zou & Ingram, 2013). At the group level, members balance simultaneous needs to belong and to be special and unique (Smith & Berg, 1987), and may find some pleasure in intense, negative rivalries with other groups (Fiol, Pratt, & O'Connor, 2009). At the organizational level, leaders and employees balance contradictory needs for competition and cooperation, utilitarian (e.g., profit-making) and normative (e.g., saving the environment) identities, organizational stability and change, structure and flexibility, exploring and exploiting, and short-term success and long-term sustainability (e.g., Albert & Adams, 2003; Albert & Whetten, 1985; Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2015; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Ingram & Roberts, 2000; Klein, Ziegert, Knight, & Xiao, 2006; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2008; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Smith & Tushman, 2005; Weir, 2011). To the degree that such complex social, practical, and motivational situations are at the same time oppositional, we would argue that they give rise to emotions and attitudes that are just as complex and contradictory and are best characterized as ambivalent (Ashforth et al., 2014; Wang & Pratt, 2008).

A count of papers published on ambivalence confirms widespread recognition of and an accelerating interest in ambivalence across management disciplines, including organizational behavior, organizational theory, and strategy, in addition to other fields (e.g., psychology; see Table 1). This interest has begun to lead to some synthesis regarding how ambivalence is evoked within organizations (Ashforth & Reingen, 2014; Ashforth et al., 2014; Fong & Tiedens, 2002; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; Pratt & Doucet, 2000; Pratt & Pradies, 2011; Rothman & Melwani, 2017), in everyday life (Ersner-Hershfield, Mikels, Sullivan, & Carstensen, 2008; Larsen, McGraw, & Cacioppo, 2001; Larsen & McGraw, 2011; Laurenceau, Troy, & Carver, 2005), and within the laboratory (de Vega, Diaz, & Leon, 1997; Larsen, McGraw, Mellers, & Cacioppo, 2004; Schimmack, 2001; Williams & Aaker, 2002).

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

TABLE 1
Total Counts of Articles Referencing Ambivalence, Mixed Emotions, or Mixed Feelings

	Totals			
Decade	**Total Number of Articles**	**Total Number of Articles in Management Journals**	**Total Number of Articles in Psychology Journals**	**Total Number of Articles in Other Journals (Sociology, Marketing, Business Ethics)**
1940–1959	15	4	0	11
1960–1979	55	3	20	32
1980–1999	139	19	86	34
2000–present	247	43	147	57
Totals	456	69	253	134

The category of other journals included a small subset of A-level journals from relevant related fields for comparison purposes only and were not meant to comprise an exhaustive list: sociology: *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, and *The Sociological Review*; marketing: *Journal of Consumer Research*; business ethics: *Journal of Business Ethics*. The search was conducted through ProQuest and Web of Science databases on September 19, 2014.

The search was restricted to specified terms appearing in an article title (ProQuest and Web of Science) or abstract (ProQuest). The search terms included ambivalence*, mixed emotions*, and mixed feelings. The search was limited to articles related to organizational behavior/management, social psychology, sociology, marketing, and business ethics.

Second, we focus our review not just on the more traditionally discussed negative outcomes of or responses to ambivalence, but also on the less intuitive positive (beneficial and functional) outcomes/responses (see Pratt & Doucet, 2000). By functional and beneficial, we refer to reactions to ambivalence that foster enhanced affective, cognitive, behavioral, and relational outcomes at the personal, interpersonal, group, and organizational levels of analysis. Specifically, recent work suggests that contrary to assumptions, when it comes to ambivalence, experiencing it rather than resolving it may be functional and beneficial. Indeed, a number of empirical studies and a few theoretical articles suggest there are benefits from experiencing and expressing ambivalence, and these benefits appear at multiple levels of analysis (Fong, 2006; Guarana & Hernandez, 2015; Plambeck & Weber, 2009; Pradies & Pratt, 2016; Pratt & Pradies, 2011; Rees, Rothman, Lehavy, & Sanchez-Burks, 2013; Rothman & Melwani, 2017; Rothman & Northcraft, 2015; Rothman & Wiesenfeld, 2007; Vogus, Rothman, Sutcliffe, & Weick, 2014; Weick, 2001).

Third, to facilitate prediction and management, we want to know why these effects happen, and when more positive versus more negative effects are likely to occur. That is, unlike other perspectives on ambivalence, we make it a point to review the specific cognitive, emotional, and behavioral mechanisms that have been either theorized or empirically tested thus far and that facilitate the transformation of ambivalence into a beneficial force ("why" ambivalence is beneficial), as well as the moderators that determine when the effects of ambivalence are positive or negative ("when" ambivalence is beneficial).

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

WHAT AMBIVALENCE IS AND IS NOT

To provide a foundation for our arguments, we begin by discussing what ambivalence is and is not. Table 2 provides key definitions and some readings on each of the different forms of ambivalence that we review—including attitudinal ambivalence, emotional ambivalence (or mixed emotions), relational ambivalence, trait ambivalence, and expressed ambivalence. Although the specific wording of their definitions may slightly differ, these definitions share important features. Most definitions of ambivalence emphasize the simultaneous existence of strong, polar opposite feelings or attitudes toward a given object, event, idea, or person. Indeed, ambivalence literally refers to the experience of two (*ambi*) opposing forces (*valences*) and is derived from the Latin *ambo*, or "both" and *valere*, which means "to be strong" (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Building from these different conceptualizations, and particularly from Ashforth et al. (2014: 1454), we define ambivalence as the simultaneous experience of opposing orientations[1] toward an object or target, where "orientation refers to the actor's alignment or position with regard to the object" (Ashforth et al., 2014: 1454).

Ambivalence is similar to, but distinct from, a variety of other constructs. Table 3 [from Ashforth et al. (2014)] describes the differences between ambivalence and cognitive dissonance, emotional dissonance, hypocrisy, ambiguity, and equivocality at the individual level. In general, these constructs differ because ambivalence is about oppositions, and not

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

TABLE 2
Key Works and Areas of Ambivalence Scholarship at the Individual Level

Construct	Source	Definition
Ambivalence	Ashforth et al. (2014)	Simultaneously oppositional positive and negative orientations toward an object. Ambivalence includes cognition ("I think about X") and/or emotion ("I feel about X")
Trait ambivalence	Sincoff (1990)	Overlapping approach-avoidance tendencies, manifested behaviorally, cognitively, or affectively, and directed toward a given person or experience
Attitude ambivalence	Cacioppo, Gardner, and Berntson (1997), Glicke and Fiske (1996), Priester and Petty (1996), Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin (1995), van Harreveld et al. (2015)	Simultaneous positive and negative attitudes about a target
Mixed emotions	Larsen et al. (2001), Larsen and McGraw (2014),	The cooccurrence of positive and negative affects
Emotional ambivalence	Fong (2006), Pratt and Doucet (2000), Pratt and Rosa (2003), Rees, Rothman, Lehavy, and Sanchez-Burks, 2013	The simultaneous experience of positive and negative emotions about the same target (such as a person, situation, object, symbol, or idea)
Relational ambivalence	Uchino, Holt-Lunstad, Uno, and Flinders (2001)	Network members who are a source of both positivity and negativity
Expressed ambivalence	Fourie (2003), Givens (1978), Rothman (2011), Rothman and Northcraft (2015), Sincoff (1990, 1992), Schachner, Schaver, and Mikulincer (2005)	Expression of tension and conflict. Tense and conflicted facial expressions, body posture, behavior, tone of voice, and/or movement is shown by conflicted approach and avoid behaviors such as movement in one direction and then another direction in both the face and the body. On the face, by moving between inner brow raising and lowering and shifting gaze. In the body, by fidgeting hands, tilting head back and forth

simply inconsistencies (cognitive dissonance), discrepancies (emotional dissonance), multiplicities (equivocality), or uncertainties (ambiguities). To this list, we add other constructs that may be confused with ambivalence. Table 4 distinguishes individually held ambivalence from specific types of mixed feelings such as those held during meaningful endings (poignancy) or as a result of personality (emotional complexity and affective synchrony). It also distinguishes individually held ambivalence from its likely outcomes (paradoxical frames and integrative complexity).

ANTECEDENTS OF AMBIVALENCE

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

A second source of ambivalence in organizations (and elsewhere) is *relationships*. As we discuss next, psychodynamic scholars emphasize the quality of parent–child relationships as a source of ambivalence (e.g., Bowlby, 1982; Horney, 1945). However, ambivalence may form in other relationships over time. Indeed, because "familiarity breeds ambivalence" (Brooks & Highhouse, 2006: 105), factors such as the length of time spent in a relationship, frequency of interaction, and interaction across multiple domains of work and life may cause negative aspects to rise to the surface (Braiker & Kelley, 1979).

TABLE 3
Construct Definitions and Relationships to Ambivalence at the Individual Level

Construct	Source	Definition
Ambivalence	Ashforth et al. (2014)	Simultaneous oppositional positive and negative orientations toward an object. Ambivalence includes cognition ("I think about X") and/or emotion ("I feel about X")
Cognitive dissonance	Kantola et al. (1984), Baek (2010)	"When a person has two beliefs or items of knowledge that are not consistent with each other" (Kantola et al., 1984: 417). There is conceptual overlap between dissonance and ambivalence (Baek, 2010), but this definition suggests that dissonance arises when there is inconsistency between thoughts (e.g., I want to hire candidate A and I want to not hire candidate A). Additionally, cognitive dissonance is exclusively cognitive, whereas ambivalence can be cognitive and/or affective
Emotional dissonance	Diestel and Schmidt (2011)	"The discrepancy between emotions felt and those required by the job role is commonly referred to as emotional dissonance" (Diestel & Schmidt, 2011: 643). As with the distinction above regarding cognitive dissonance, ambivalence requires opposition and not simply discrepancy. Thus, a role may require one to smile when one does not feel like it (emotional dissonance), but this is different than simultaneously feeling happy and not happy (ambivalence). Moreover, the inconsistency in emotional dissonance is between feeling and behavior that one's role demands. Ambivalence is not necessarily emotional and does not include a behavior
Hypocrisy	Fassin and Buelens (2011)	"Clear inconsistency between word and deed" (Fassin & Buelens, 2011: 587). Hypocrisy is a contradiction between a statement and action, which is generally perceived and labeled by an observer. Ambivalence involves cognition and/or emotion rather than behavior, although ambivalence may cause an actor to behave in ways that could be perceived by others as hypocritical. Thus, hypocrisy can be an outcome of ambivalence
Ambiguity	Carson et al. (2006)	"The degree of uncertainty inherent in perceptions of the environmental state" (Carson et al., 2006: 1059). Ambiguity is concerned with uncertainty or a lack of clarity, whereas ambivalence is the experience of two clear but opposing thoughts and/or feelings toward an object
Equivocality	Daft and Macintonsh (1981)	"The multiplicity of meaning conveyed by information about organizational activities" (Daft & Macintosh, 1981: 211). Equivocality captures the potential for multiple meanings and interpretations of a message. If these meanings are oppositional, there is potential for the equivocality to trigger ambivalence

Reprinted from Table 1 from Ashforth et al. (2014).

Thus, work relationships that are longstanding, are of high frequency, and/or are "multiplex" (i.e., involving different relationship types such as personal and professional) may cause ambivalence [for a review see Methot, Melwani & Rothman, 2017]. More generally, Pradies and Pratt (2016) argued that relational interactions are critical to collective-level ambivalence and that group-level ambivalence can result from

TABLE 4
Definitions of Related Constructs at the Individual Level

Construct	Source	Definition
Poignancy	Ersner-Hershfield et al. (2008)	A mixture of happiness and sadness that occurs when one faces meaningful endings that signify the passage of time
Emotional complexity trait	Kang and Shaver (2004)	A tendency to have well-differentiated, broad emotional experiences
Affective synchrony trait	Rafaeli, Rogers, and Revelle (2007)	The tendency to experience mixed emotions regularly
Paradoxical frames	Miron-Spektor, Gino, and Argote (2011)	Mental templates that individuals use to embrace seemingly contradictory statements or dimensions of a task or situation
Integrative complexity	Suedfeld, Tetlock, and Streufert (1992)	The capacity and willingness to acknowledge the legitimacy of competing perspectives on the same issue (differentiation) and to forge conceptual links among these perspectives (integration)

either interactions among similarly ambivalent individuals or interactions among competing subgroups within a larger collective.

A third major source of ambivalence in organizations involves certain types of *organizational events*. One of the most profound events is organizational change. Indeed research suggests that change can elicit conflicting feelings and emotions because it involves both negative (e.g., giving up cherished traditions, introducing uncertainty) and positive (e.g., hope for the future, new opportunities) simultaneously (Piderit, 2000; Rothman & Melwani, 2017; Vince & Broussine, 1996). To illustrate, in their study of public service managers, Vince and Broussine (1996) showed that simultaneous experience of incongruent emotions, such as excitement and fear, resulted from organizational change. Such events need not be dramatic and organization wide, however. Research in psychology suggests that personal transition events may elicit ambivalence as well (e.g., Ersner-Hershfield et al., 2008; Larsen et al., 2001). More generally, any events that contain positive and negative elements may, not surprisingly, elicit contradictory feelings and thoughts (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005; Diener & Iran-Nejad, 1986; Laurenceau et al., 2005; Schimmack, 2001; de Vega et al., 1997; Williams & Aaker, 2002). For example, Larsen et al. (2004) found that the experience of disappointing wins and relieving losses trigger ambivalence; hence, one might expect organizational members to experience ambivalence in response to a whole host of events such as in the wake of positive, yet lower than expected, earnings results or in the wake of a crisis where the impact on stock price was less than analysts had anticipated.

A fourth major source of ambivalence in organizations is *structural conditions.* This source of ambivalence is the domain of "sociological ambivalence." Sociological ambivalence explores conflicting demands inherent in social structures such as norms (Merton, 1976) and roles (Coser, 1979), and collectively held identities (Albert & Adams, 2003; Albert & Whetten, 1985; Wang & Pratt, 2008). Such structurally-embedded contradictions may ultimately influence ambivalence at the level we are discussing: within individuals. To illustrate, physicians are supposed to demonstrate "detached concern" whereby they are empathetic but maintain professional distance (Merton & Barber, 1976). To the degree that such norms and roles are internalized, individually held ambivalence may result. Further, when two, shared conceptualizations of "who we are" as an organization are "defended as inviolate, experienced as incompatible, and yet found to be indispensable" (Albert & Adams, 2003: 36), these "hybrid" collective-level identities can serve as a source for sociological ambivalence (Pradies & Pratt, 2016; Wang & Pratt, 2008), and thus are viewed as potential antecedents to individually-held ambivalence.

Other organizational conditions, such as limited resources, competing reward systems, or conflicting goals also spark ambivalence. Zou and Ingram (2013) recently found that employees are likely to feel ambivalently toward those in similar social network positions (i.e., structurally equivalent). Specifically, managers are more likely to feel ambivalently toward friends who are the same sex, in the same work unit, share the same social rank, and share many common friends. They argued that similarity breeds friendship, but it also leads to competition because it encourages social comparisons (Zho & Ingram, 2013). Indeed, employees sometimes have to compete for

promotions with their colleagues with whom they also have close relationships. Losing out on a promotion to a colleague/friend is likely to give rise to conflicted feelings derived from not only believing one deserves the promotion but also wanting to maintain a friendship with the colleague.

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

THE EFFECTS OF AMBIVALENCE: TWO KEY DIMENSIONS

As noted, from its original roots in psychology and later sociology, ambivalence has largely been considered a condition to be avoided or resolved. Because it violates fundamental consistency motives (Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958), ambivalence is largely characterized as undesirable, unpleasant, and physiologically arousing [see, e.g., van Harreveld, Rutjens, Rotteveel, Nordgren, and van der Plight (2009) and van Harreveld, Rutjens, Schneider, Nohlen, and Keskinis (2014)]. Thus, individuals are thought to be motivated to avoid and to reduce or minimize ambivalence and the discomfort it elicits in a variety of ways [see van Harreveld et al. (2009a) and van Harreveld et al. (2014) for reviews]. Indeed, the types of negative outcomes of ambivalence that have been studied in psychology largely build on the assumption that negative affect is the driving mechanism.[2] This emphasis on the negative consequences of ambivalence continues to echo in organizational research as well (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2014; Pratt & Doucet, 2000). However, examinations of ambivalence by organizational behavior and strategy scholars, in particular, have begun to view ambivalence as something that can also facilitate positive outcomes (Pratt & Pradies, 2011; Rothman & Melwani, 2017; Rothman & Northcraft, 2015) across multiple levels of analysis. In fact, one of the contributions of organizational research on the study of ambivalence has been to go beyond its negative effects (Pratt & Pradies, 2011).

We significantly extend this work by demonstrating that two key dimensions underlie most research on ambivalence and represent the negative and positive "sides" of ambivalence. These dimensions are inflexibility–flexibility and disengagement–engagement (see also Rothman & Melwani, 2017). Our review suggests that research that focuses on the degree to which ambivalence leads to inflexible (e.g., rigid) or more flexible (e.g., adaptive) responses or outcomes is largely focused on the psychological experience of ambivalence by a single entity (e.g., an individual, an organizational agent). However, research that focuses on the degree to which ambivalence leads to disengagement (e.g., moving away) or engagement (e.g., moving toward) from or with others in a relationship [cf. "knowledge" vs. "relationship" ambivalence—Pratt & Pradies (2011)] focuses on ambivalence experienced and/or expressed by an entity in interaction with another entity—such as leaders and followers, or two negotiators.

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

INFLEXIBLE–FLEXIBLE RESPONSES TO EXPERIENCING AMBIVALENCE

Research in psychology and management has shown the effects of experiencing ambivalence on (in)flexible cognition, behavior, and emotional and

[2] In psychology, the negative affect that results from ambivalent cognitions or attitudes is often referred to as "subjective" ambivalence [see Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin (1995) for discussion of the difference between objective and subjective ambivalence]. However, to reduce the confusion around various labels (e.g., subjective ambivalence vs. emotional ambivalence), we do not use this term in this article.

physical responses. First, experiencing ambivalence elicits not only one-sided, narrow thinking and bias, but also cognitive breadth, consideration of multiple perspectives, and unlearning. Second, experiencing ambivalence produces not only behavioral inflexibility for individuals and organizations in the form of reduced ability to decide, resistance to change, and paralysis, but also flexibility and adaptability. Third, experiencing ambivalence is also linked with less and more emotional, mental, and physical well-being. Perhaps counterintuitively, the observed deleterious effects of ambivalence often contain seeds of adaptable, positive, responses. Next, we map cognitive, behavioral, and affective and physical reactions along different ends of the flexibility–inflexibility continuum. We then discuss the moderators that may tip ambivalence toward one end or the other.

Cognitive Inflexibility

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

Response amplification. For decades, the experience of attitude ambivalence has been associated with response amplification of in-group members toward out-group members such as minority ethnic groups (e.g., Katz & Glass, 1979; Katz & Hass, 1988; MacDonald & Zanna, 1998; Maio, Bell, & Esses, 1996), and more recently toward controversial topics such as genetically modified food (Nordgren, van Harreveld, & van der Pligt, 2006; Nowlis, Kahn, & Dhar, 2002), abortion, nuclear power plants, and junk food taxation (Clark, Wegener, & Fabrigar, 2008). This research suggests that negative affect can mediate the effect of holding ambivalent attitudes on extreme responses toward the target of ambivalence. Specifically, ambivalence for minority group members can involve feelings of aversion and disdain but also friendly concern. When made salient, the ambivalent attitude gives rise to psychological discomfort (i.e., negative affect), and more extreme judgments allow for the reduction of this negative affect (Hass, Katz, Rizzo, Bailey, & Eisenstadt, 1991; Hass, Katz, Rizzo, Bailey, & Moore, 1992; Maio, Greenland, Bernard, & Esses, 2001).[3]

Research in management has extended these findings, demonstrating that ambivalent individuals can idealize their relationship with their organization, setting aside all negative sentiments and ultimately leading to biased and simplistic views (Pratt & Doucet, 2000; Pratt & Pradies, 2011; Vadera & Pratt, 2013). Pratt and Doucet (2000) described positive response amplification in a rural doctor who was ambivalent about joining a managed care operation, but in resolving his ambivalence came to view his new arrangement very positively—so much so that all negatives were pushed aside. He stated, "I don't see any downside at all, I have no complaints about what is going on" (Pratt and Doucet, 2000: 215). As Pratt and Pradies (2011) noted, although this approach is positive, leading to a favorable assessment of the target of one's ambivalence, it may also lead to biased and simplistic views that are "likely, at minimum, to lead to disappointment when undesirable aspects of the new relationship invariably appear" (p. 927).

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

Confirmation bias. In some psychological research, the experience of attitude ambivalence is also related to confirmation bias. In order to reduce attitude ambivalence, people appear to attempt to resolve their ambivalence through the selective

[3] Although some research has found that intergroup ambivalence is negatively correlated with physiological arousal, suggesting that arousal is not a necessary mediator of the relationship between intergroup ambivalence and information processing (Maio et al., 2001).

elaboration of one-sided information and confirmatory information processing. Essentially, individuals experience heightened accessibility, search, consideration, and use of information that benefits their currently-held conceptions (e.g., hypothesis, belief, or attitude) and neglect information that may disprove them (Clark et al., 2008). Seeking and processing confirmatory information is viewed as more likely to reduce attitude ambivalence (i.e., creating a univalent attitude) and the discomfort (i.e., negative affect) associated with it than seeking and processing disconfirmatory information. However, as we discuss in the next section, it is also worth noting that some organizational behavior research has found the opposite, that experiencing *emotional* ambivalence can broaden individuals' attention rather than narrow it.

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

Prior work theorizes that the desire to reduce ambivalence-induced negative affect explains the relationship between ambivalent attitudes and compensatory order perceptions (van Harreveld et al., 2014) as well as confirmatory information processing (e.g., Nordgren et al., 2006; Sawicki, Wegener, Clark, Fabrigar, Smith, & Durso, 2013).[4] Indeed, research suggests that feeling torn and conflicted (e.g., Clark et al., 2008; Sawicki et al., 2013) and self-reported negative emotions (e.g., Nordgren et al., 2006; van Harreveld et al., 2014) underlie the relationship between holding ambivalent attitudes and engaging in selective and biased information processing and perception. Specifically, because ambivalent attitudes increase uncertainty-related negative emotions (e.g., uncertainty, anxiety, irritation, doubt, and nervousness), they foster motivated perceptions of the world as orderly (compensatory order), which appears to affirm or compensate for internal disorder resulting from felt ambivalence. In this way, compensatory order perceptions restore the overall consistency that humans prefer (Heider, 1946; van Harreveld et al., 2014) and may help to mitigate ambivalence-induced negative affect (Jost & Burgess, 2000), thus making it easier for individuals to tolerate and accept their ambivalence without actually eliminating it (van Harreveld et al., 2014). Together, these findings suggest that ambivalent attitude holders are looking for simple order and cognitive structure, perhaps to compensate for the complexity and disorder in their attitudes, but that this simple order can be inaccurate and biased.

Cognitive Flexibility

In contrast to the large body of work in social psychology that posits that individuals turn to one-sided or simplistic thinking in an effort to reduce ambivalence or the negative affect it produces, a growing body of research in management has taken a decidedly more positive perspective. Scholars in this area have increasingly argued that ambivalence my actually be quite beneficial for individuals' cognitive flexibility—broadening the scope of their attentional span to allow them to attend to divergent perspectives and also to engage in a balanced consideration of those perspectives (Rees et al., 2013; Rothman & Melwani, 2017). Ambivalence appears to be related to two types of cognitive flexibility, increasing individuals' (1) cognitive breadth and scope of attention, such as being open to different perspectives and unlearning what they know, and (2) motivation to engage in balanced consideration of these multiple different perspectives due to their feelings of conflict. Two notable differences between this body of work and the work reviewed earlier are that (1) this work is largely found in research on emotional ambivalence and not attitudinal ambivalence and (2) negative affect has not been shown to drive these effects on flexibility. Research in this area is also largely from organizational scholars.

Cognitive breadth and scope of attention. Using a variety of different research methodologies, management research offers compelling empirical evidence that ambivalence can broaden individuals' attention span. Experimental research by Fong (2006), for instance, demonstrated that experiencing emotional ambivalence (simultaneously happy and sad relative to happiness or sadness alone) expands *attentional* breadth, thus increasing creativity as indicated by the number of distant associations made in a conceptual insight task. Fong (2006) suggested that the mechanism underlying this effect is that emotional ambivalence is an unusual or atypical state, signaling

[4] This is supported by evidence that the effects on cognitive processing are found only in the context of mixed feelings (e.g., Clark et al., 2008; Sawicki et al., 2013) or self-reported negative emotions (e.g., Nordgren et al., 2006; van Harreveld et al., 2014).

that the individual is in an unusual environment. Specifically, "[ambivalence] signals that it may be necessary or adaptive to process stimuli in this environment in a flexible, multifaceted way, and to be on the watch for new associations" (p. 1019).

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

Organizational field research additionally demonstrates that ambivalence is used as a tool to increase individuals' receptivity to organizational messages. Pratt and Barnett (1997) found that Amway distributors attempted to generate ambivalence among recruits to make them more receptive to Amway messages. Specifically, Amway veteran distributors strategically induced ambivalence in their new recruits to facilitate their recruits' letting go of preexisting assumptions about the world and their place in it (e.g., that their non-Amway bosses do care about them). For instance, they used language that induced intense conflicting emotions in recruits: excitement about specific tangible dreams and desires as well as dissatisfaction, fear, and doubt about their current lives. These ambivalent feelings motivated unlearning in the new recruits, which is a "process of discarding obsolete and misleading knowledge" (p. 82), thus allowing these recruits to develop new responses and mental maps, and for flexible changes in their thinking. Plambeck and Weber (2009) further theorized that having ambivalent attitudes toward the enlargement of the European Union led CEOs to be more receptive to additional information from others in the organization, to consider a broader spectrum of information, and to be motivated to engage in more distant search for information before making strategic decisions.

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

Rothman and Melwani (2017) recently suggested, in their theorizing about the functions of emotional ambivalence, that it may be this very experience of conflict and contradiction inherent in the state of ambivalence that motivates the balanced processing of divergent perspectives. That is, feelings of conflict and contradiction may be a critical mechanism explaining why ambivalent emotions have these effects on flexible thinking. Along with other scholars studying emotional ambivalence (e.g., Fong, 2006; Rees et al., 2013), they used the affect-as-information model (Schwarz & Clore, 1983) to theorize about why emotional ambivalence should increase cognitive flexibility. Specifically, they suggested that because emotional ambivalence provides *contradictory and conflicting* signals to

[5] Although indirect, other psychological research also suggests that ambivalent attitudes are more prone to change when attacked (e.g., Bassili, 1996), which is likely to focus individuals' attention on the attitude and is an indication that ambivalent individuals are open to alternative perspectives.

individuals, it should alert them to the complex and contradictory elements in their environment; drawing their attention to divergent perspectives and the *conflict* inherent in the ambivalent state should also motivate a balanced consideration of that information (Rothman & Melwani, 2017).[6]

Behavioral Inflexibility

Research on ambivalence in psychology and management has also examined a range of outcomes that we think can be best described as indicating behavioral inflexibility, including (1) behavioral paralysis and (2) resistance to change and avoidance.

Behavioral paralysis. Ambivalence can also create behavioral paralysis. For instance, psychological research has shown that ambivalence leads to less activity directed at one's goal and to more time spent thinking about the goal; more inhibition of behavior and increased rumination (Emmons & King, 1988). In a study of organizational change at Lego, Lüscher and Lewis (2008) found that managers who experienced the fundamental dilemma of delegation, in which they simultaneously empower employees while also losing their own control and efficiency, were more likely to experience managerial ambivalence, and this led them to be paralyzed. Paralysis, of course, should largely be considered a negative outcome of ambivalence. However, as we note later, some management scholars consider inaction as the seed for positive outcomes (Pratt & Doucet, 2000; Pratt & Pradies, 2011; Rothman & Wiesenfeld, 2007; Weick, 1998, 2001).

Resistance to change. Considering the strong evidence that ambivalence is a common reaction to change and personal transition (Larsen et al., 2001), it is somewhat surprising that relatively few papers link ambivalence and change in management research. In a notable exception examining change in public service organizations in the United Kingdom, Vince and Broussine (1996) found that managers reacted to changes in structure and financial constraints with emotional ambivalence (excitement and fear, hatred and hope) and this led them to act defensively, suppressing action in support of the change or not acknowledging the reality of change. Piderit (2000) further described how a manager's ambivalence (i.e., initial supportive attitude matched by contradictory negative emotions and intentions) yielded resistance, neglect, and avoidance. She suggested that because it would be difficult for people to articulate their negative emotional responses to change, it might cause them to turn inward and work through their ambivalence alone, or even avoid engaging with the subject entirely.

While empirical research on the mechanisms linking ambivalence with behavioral inflexibility is sparse, it has been suggested that ambivalence may make it challenging to reach a decision because it creates uncertainty, making it difficult to evaluate choices, take action, or form opinions, thus increasing the likelihood of paralysis (Sincoff, 1990), or the incapacity to act. Indeed, recent empirical evidence demonstrates that manipulations of mixed feelings increase decision delay (Nohlen et al., 2015), suggesting that there is reason to believe that effects of ambivalence on behavioral inflexibility, like cognitive inflexibility, are also driven by ambivalence-induced negative affect.

Behavioral Flexibility

Perhaps surprisingly given the earlier review, some research suggests that individuals and organizations may make more productive use of ambivalence and become more behaviorally flexible and adaptable when they embrace rather than avoid or attempt to quickly resolve their ambivalence. This insight is especially evident in management scholarship, which has theorized about, and started to uncover examples of organizations productively using ambivalence, and even training individuals to use their ambivalence to increase not only individual adaptability in decision-making (e.g., reducing escalation of commitment; Rothman & Melwani, 2017), but also collective or group adaptability (e.g., increasing mindful organizing; Vogus et al., 2014). Importantly, our review of extant work suggests that behavioral flexibility takes on slightly different manifestations depending on whether one is looking at the individual, interpersonal, or collective

[6] Rothman and Melwani (2017) noted that these arguments are consistent with other research on psychological conflict, which have also suggested that conflict may be the engine that motivates other forms of cognitive flexibility such as integrative complexity and creativity. For instance, internal conflict has been suggested as a mechanism explaining why bicultural individuals who are equally identified with both cultures and who experience greater conflict between their cultures are more integratively complex than those with a clear preference for one culture over another and who thus experience less conflict (Tadmor, Tetlock, & Peng, 2009). In addition, related research on mind–body dissonance—when bodily expressions contradict mental states (Huang & Galinsky, 2011) and paradoxical frames (Miron-Spektor et al., 2011)—alludes to the fact that the inherent conflict in these states is the engine that motivates creativity, and research on the attenuation of confirmatory thinking patterns shows that this can be driven by nonconscious goal conflicts (Kleiman & Hassin, 2013).

level of analysis. Respectively, these responses are as follows: (1) individual openness to change and reduced escalation of commitment, (2) interpersonal adaptability, and (3) and collective adaptability.

Individual openness to change/reduced escalation of commitment. Much research on attitude ambivalence in psychology emphasizes the "weakness" of ambivalent attitudes, including effects such as greater susceptibility to change (Armitage & Conner, 2000; Bassili, 1996) and lower attitude–behavior consistency (Armitage, 2003; Fabrigar, MacDonald, & Wegener, 2005; Jonas, Diehl, & Broemer, 1997). The assumption appears to be that such openness to change is not a good thing. By contrast, management scholarship seems to view such openness to change in a more positive light, as reflecting flexibility of action. For instance, Weick (2004) was perhaps the first to posit that networks that embrace doubt and knowing can weaken the conditions that give rise to excessive commitment and escalation toward a course of action because it leads people to treat commitments as more reversable, more tentative, and providing a justification for change (i.e., to stay agile). More recent theoretical work by Rothman and Melwani (2017) has focused on unpacking the psychological mechanism by which leaders' emotional ambivalence may reduce their escalating commitment toward a failed course of action, and by implication, increase openness to change. Specifically, they suggested that emotional ambivalence not only inhibits a rush to action (which may be viewed as a short-term paralysis), but as noted earlier, also increases the likelihood that leaders will consider a broader and more balanced set of relevant alternatives. With more alternative options in mind, they will be able to disengage from or reduce the strength of their initial decision commitment to any one course of action, and thus be more open to change course. Such dynamics resonate with recent study of the enlargement of the European Union. Here, Plambeck and Weber (2009) found that CEOs who ambivalently evaluated enlargement were indeed more open to change and led their organizations in actions that they perceived to be broader, more novel (e.g., completely new for the organization), and riskier (e.g., creating new subsidiaries).

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

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

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

Weick observed that an attitude of wisdom—and its simultaneous embrace of knowing and not knowing—is inherently ambivalent and increases the adaptability of wildland firefighters. Specifically, his research on firefighters showed that they are trained to experience ambivalence and thus develop an attitude of wisdom by engaging fires warily. They only engage fires once they have located escape routes, safety zones, lookouts, and communication links (Gleason, 1991; Weick, 1996). Whereas lookouts and communication links imply knowing and knowability of a fire, escape routes and safety zones treat that knowledge tentatively in the event that a retreat may be necessary. Wildland firefighters also follow the maxim "don't hand over a fire in the heat of the

day," thus exhibiting an attitude of wisdom by acknowledging the unknowable, unpredictable dynamics of uncontrolled wildland fires that are even more manifest in the heat of the day, and pairing that acknowledgment with the knowledge-based practice of handing the fire over at a different time when the situation is more predictable, and thus more knowable (Weick, 1998, 2004). Schulman (1993) showed similar dynamics in control room operators of the Diablo Canyon nuclear reactor. These operators refer to their ambivalence (i.e., embrace of knowing and not knowing) as conceptual slack. Specifically, they hold a diverse set of theories and assumptions about technology and production processes that act as a hedge against their incomplete knowledge regarding failure modes (Schulman, 1993). This ambivalence allows for more adaptive responses such as rapidly revising critical policies and procedures and otherwise fostering higher quality interdepartmental collaboration and coordination.

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

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

Emotional and Physical Inflexibility

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

Psychopathology. Since its inception as a term by Bleuler (1911/1950) and later by Freud (1917) and Horney (1945), ambivalence has been studied as a component of a varied set of mental health conditions, including schizophrenia, neurosis, depression, and obsessive–compulsive disorder [see Sincoff (1990) for a review]. For example, obsessive–compulsive personalities, who tend to view their ambivalent feelings and attitudes as major weaknesses, also tend to combat their ambivalence by demanding either-or, black or white—in addition to positive—responses to all experiences (Sincoff, 1990), thus leading to less flexibility in perception. In addition, Sincoff (1990) described how ambivalent object

relations can lead to increased rates of felt depression, guilt, and worthlessness when ambivalence is highly internalized. For example, mourning at the death of a loved one can turn into depression as ambivalent feelings are left unresolved (Freud, 1917).

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

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

Importantly, in cross-sectional research by Fingerman et al. (2008), health-related effects also stemmed from the partner's ambivalence rather than from the individual's own ambivalence about the relationship. For example, when offspring felt greater emotional ambivalence toward their mothers, their mothers experienced poorer health, and when fathers felt greater emotional ambivalence for their child, offspring reported poorer physical health. Research is needed that tests these effects in non-cross-sectional ways and that examines the mechanisms, as the authors note that it is possible the effects go in the opposite direction.

Emotional and Physical Flexibility

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

Psychological resilience. Larsen, Hemenover, Norris, and Cacioppo (2003) have proposed in their coactivation model of health that experiencing positive emotions simultaneously with negative emotions—emotional ambivalence—may be optimal for well-being during difficult situations. Emotional ambivalence may be able to help people develop a strategy of "taking the good with the bad," which allows them to confront and process the negative events that led to their negative emotions, to face these negative life events and gain insight and meaning into them, and subsequently to experience enhanced well-being (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000;

Larsen et al., 2003). Davis, Zautra, and Smith (2004) further suggested that one pathway to resilience across the adult lifespan may be the "ability to maintain affective complexity in the face of life's difficulties" (p. 1155).

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

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

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

Scholars have speculated about the mechanism underlying these relationships, theorizing that when individuals experience emotional ambivalence they are able to make meaning of negative events in their lives, thus allowing them to become more resilient because they can confront and process those events (Adler & Hershfield, 2012; Larsen et al., 2003), but future research is needed to directly test whether meaning-making is a mediating link between emotional ambivalence and well-being.

In their dynamic model of affect, Davis et al. (2004) argued that adding positive to negative affect inherent in chronic pain situations can help improve individuals' ability to cope with the long-term pain by widening individuals' affective space (i.e., decreasing the inverse relationship between positive and negative affect; Coifman et al., 2007; Zautra, Reich, Davis, Potter, & Nicolson, 2000; Zautra, Berkhof, & Nicolson, 2002), which counters the negative effects of stress such as tunnel vision and allows the individual to increase processing complexity, thereby improving adaptation and well-being (Zautra, 2003). Ambivalence following a negative event is also thought to aid coping by increasing positive reappraisal of the situation (Fredrickson, 2001) and by boosting problem-focused coping (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). In addition, a more basic mechanism has been suggested: that the cooccurrence of positive emotions mitigates the maladaptive physiological impact of negative emotions (Hershfield et al., 2013). However, future experimental research using physiological measures and field research using experience sampling is needed to fully test these mechanisms.

Our review of the ambivalence-(in)flexibility relationship suggests that most psychological research on attitude ambivalence predicts highly inflexible responses. Paralleling dissonance-based arguments, which suggest that holding two inconsistent cognitions leads to a negative state until dissonance is resolved (Festinger, 1957), one of the most prevalent themes within the these ambivalence literatures is that the motivation to reduce the negative affect or

psychological discomfort produced by ambivalent attitudes (Hass et al., 1991; van Harreveld et al., 2015) drives the inflexible cognitive, behavioral, and resilience-related responses to experiencing ambivalence. Also paralleling dissonance-based selective exposure hypotheses, in which people experiencing dissonance are expected to avoid counterattitudinal information while seeking proattitudinal information (Festinger, 1964), ambivalent individuals are also expected to "think [themselves] toward a univalent attitude" (van Harreveld et al., 2014: 1674) because they are presumably motivated to directly reduce ambivalence [Ashforth et al., 2014; Festinger, 1964; Heider, 1946; see van Harreveld et al. (2009b) for a review] and the negative affect it produces. In short, the experience of conflicting thoughts and emotions are thought to be uncomfortable and to produce negative affect, and thus to shed this discomfort, individuals tend to drop one "side" of the conflict in favor of the other. However, at the same time, scholarship on emotional ambivalence (e.g., Rothman & Melwani, 2017) suggests that it may be this very experience of conflict and contradiction inherent in the state of ambivalence that not only increases attention to divergent perspectives but also motivates the balanced processing of those divergent perspectives.

Moving Along the Inflexibility–Flexibility Continuum: A Discussion of Key Moderators

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

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

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

Not having to choose. Psychological scholars have argued that attitude ambivalence becomes unpleasant when one is forced to commit to one side of the issue (van Harreveld et al., 2009b) but is less unpleasant when not forced to choose. More specifically, it is the feeling of the need to choose between opposing orientations, rather than their existence, that makes ambivalence unpleasant (van Harreveld et al., 2015). van Harreveld et al. (2009b) found that being forced to choose to support one side of an issue about which one has ambivalent attitudes leads to increased uncertainty about the consequences of one's choice, and in turn, observable increases in physiological arousal (as measured by galvanic skin response). Thus, ambivalence is experienced as uncomfortable only when a choice has to be made, a circumstance in which people worry about the uncertain consequences of their decision. However, perhaps surprisingly given the assumption that ambivalence increases negative affect in general—and critical to our understanding of when ambivalence can be functional—when there is no need to choose, ambivalence is no more stressful than, and elicits just as little physiological arousal as, holding

a univalent attitude. In fact, ambivalent individuals who are not forced to choose feel just as much positive affect and even less negative affect, including less regret, anxiety, and fear, than individuals with univalent attitudes (van Harreveld et al., 2009a). Very recent psychological research further suggests that when people are not forced to choose, they may even *develop* ambivalence as a self-protective strategy in the face of uncertain and negative outcomes, cultivating ambivalence about a target they are uncertain they can obtain (e.g., a coveted job) in order to protect their feelings in the event that they fail to get what they want. Such ambivalence provides what Reich and Wheeler (2016) called an evaluative hedge, buffering their feelings from failure to achieve their desired target.

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

DISENGAGEMENT–ENGAGEMENT RESPONSES TO EXPERIENCING AND OBSERVING AMBIVALENCE

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

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

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

Interestingly, research on the effects of ambivalence on both relational and social (dis)engagement show largely similar patterns. In both early and current research, experiencing ambivalence in relationships has been found to cause people to react by "moving away" (i.e., disengaging or distancing) from the target of their ambivalence, "moving against" (i.e., aggression toward or negatively engaging with), "moving toward" (i.e., becoming emotionally closer to) others, or alternating between two of these responses (i.e., vacillation; Horney, 1945; Pratt & Doucet, 2000). Similarly, in recent research, expressing ambivalence in social interactions has been found to cause observers to react by "moving away" (i.e., negative evaluations and distrust), "moving against" (i.e., dominance and aggression), but also "moving toward" (i.e., empowerment and integrative problem solving). These effects occur through the inferences that another person's expression of ambivalence elicits in an observer (Rothman, 2011; Rothman & Northcraft, 2015). There is not yet evidence that it causes observers to vacillate, however.

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

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

Disengagement

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

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

Social disengagement. Rothman and colleagues (Belkin & Rothman, 2017; Marsh & Rothman, 2013) suggested that expressed ambivalence can lead others to disengage from the ambivalent individual as well, producing negative evaluations and reduced trust. Marsh and Rothman (2013) demonstrated that individuals rate ambivalent physicians as significantly lower quality and less influential than either certain or uncertain physicians. They argued that people consult experts to produce decisions and if an expert signals he or she lacks the *ability* to decide, the exact thing he or she is consulted for, people lose faith in his or her expertise. Research also demonstrates that ambivalence can signal unpredictability and thus a lack of integrity (Belkin & Rothman, 2017; Bushman & Holt-Lunstad, 2009) and that one is hypocritical and fickle (Meyerson & Scully, 1995), and can therefore hinder the development of interpersonal trust in relationships and business-related interactions (Belkin & Rothman, 2017). The net result of perceived unpredictability, negative interpersonal evaluation, and lack of trust is that individuals want to disengage from the ambivalent individual.

Engagement

While research in psychology, especially in the area of romantic relationships, has suggested that

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

Self-Concerned Relational and Social Engagement

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

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

Moving against social interaction partners. Expressions of ambivalence can also lead individuals who observe this expression in social interaction partners to aggressively move against the ambivalent individual. It seems that the expression of ambivalence in an interaction partner provides an opportunity for—even implicitly invites—observers to dominate the social interaction, as shown in experimental research (Rothman, 2011). Rothman (2011) demonstrated in a series of experiments that observing the nonverbal expression of emotional ambivalence in a decision-making partner led individuals to plan to take charge of their future joint decision-making task (e.g., being closed minded to their ambivalent partner's contributions). They also took advantage of the ambivalent partner materially, taking more money from her (relative to a happy, angry, or neutral partner) in an ultimatum bargaining game, where the only way to win was for their partner to lose. Rothman (2011) suggested that because individuals tend to act more dominantly toward partners whom they perceive to be submissive (Tiedens & Fragale, 2003) and because ambivalent partners are perceived as more deliberative, and in turn submissive, relative to individuals who express more singular emotions, observers take charge and take advantage of ambivalent partners, at least in distributive negotiations.

Other-Concerned Relational and Social Engagement

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

Positive attitudes toward minority groups. In research on ambivalence–response–amplification (Gergen & Jones, 1963; Katz & Glass, 1979), the attitudes of individuals in majority groups (e.g., white or physically able people) toward stigmatized targets can sometimes be more extreme and polarized—

either positively or negatively—than evaluations of nonstigmatized targets as a result of having ambivalent attitudes toward minority groups that have been the victim of discrimination. To resolve their ambivalence, majority members will observe the actions of minority members to gather information about them. Whether ambivalent individuals develop a decidedly negative or positive response to a minority out-group depends on the nature of the data collected about that minority out-group. As noted earlier, when the data are negative, minority members can engender decidedly strong negative attitudes and derogating behavior toward minority members by those in the majority. However, when the data are positive, ambivalence can be transformed into highly positive attitudes toward minority members, thus facilitating their engagement with one another. For example, Katz, Cohen, and Glass (1975) showed that White Americans gave more help to Black Americans when they received positive information about them (e.g., they were working their way through college); moreover, this helping behavior exceeded the help given to other White Americans with similar characteristics.

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

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

Trust in relationships. Pratt and Dirks (2007) have also drawn upon the research by Brickman (1987) to reconceptualize trust as a consequence of accepting ambivalence in relationships. Specifically, they suggested that inherent in trust—often defined as "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations or behavior of another" (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998)—is both a positive (e.g., expected beneficial future behavior) and a negative (e.g., vulnerability)

element that must be accepted by the trustor. When both the positive and the negative elements of the relationship are accepted, trust can result. As such, they view trust as a product of ambivalence—and argue this conceptualization explains trust dynamics more than common social exchange explanations.

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

Voice and proactivity in relationships. In a similar vein, Pratt and Doucet (2000) noted that employees who are ambivalent may act on this ambivalence by engaging positively with their organizations or colleagues via voice, or expressing ideas and suggestions that attempt to change the status quo of the organization and improve processes. As such, voice may initially look like "moving against" since it is an attempt to change the status quo, but it is moving against in a constructive, beneficial manner. It is "a less extreme form of moving against where more of the positive aspects of the relationship are maintained" (Pratt & Doucet, 2000: 216).

Expressing emotional ambivalence can also empower others to engage in more constructively assertive - integrative - responses in a negotiation (Rothman & Northcraft, 2015), as well as to empower subordinates to be more proactive (Rothman & Melwani, 2017). Specifically, in negotiations, proactivity and assertiveness are particularly beneficial for achieving high joint gain as they help negotiators avoid unilateral concessions and split-the-difference compromises. Instead, they encourage problem-solving that promotes the discovery and development of agreements that integrate both parties' wishes (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986) and benefit both both negotiators. Building on this insight, Rothman and Northcraft (2015) predicted and found that because expressed ambivalence signals submissiveness, and thus inspires dominance/aggressive behavior in others (i.e., asserting one's point of view; Rothman, 2011), negotiations that are able to create a cooperative tone may nudge that aggressive behavior in a prosocial direction, thus yielding constructive/prosocial assertiveness that is critical for growing (not just splitting) the pie. Indeed, these researchers found relatively higher joint outcomes in negotiations in which ambivalence (relative to neutrality or anger) was expressed and perceived submissiveness was the mechanism explaining these effects.

Similarly, Rothman and Melwani (2017) emphasized that leader-expressed emotional ambivalence may be a previously unexplored social factor that increases follower proactivity, specifically empowering followers to proactively speak up and take charge in order to advance bottom-up change because it signals flexibility and openness on the part of the leader. There is some empirical evidence that ambivalence may signal that an individual is appraising and thinking about the environment in a nuanced way, and is thus deliberative and cognitively flexible (Pillaud, Cavazza, & Butera, 2013; Rothman, 2011). Thus building on this evidence, Rothman and Melwani (2017) argued that on observing the leader display ambivalence, "followers may perceive this leader as someone who is flexible and open to multiple divergent perspectives before making strategic decisions, such as both confirming and disconfirming information, and as someone who is receptive to a full range of evidence—both positive and negative—about problems at hand" (p. 18). Thus, a leader expressing ambivalence can benefit the organization by encouraging positive engagement from followers.

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

Engagement and Disengagement: Vacillation

Ambivalence can also elicit a combination of responses, such as moving toward and moving away, or moving toward and moving against (i.e., vacillation).

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

Similar to the psychological work by Bowlby (1982), managerial scholars have found that workers can vacillate. However, given its origins in developmental psychology, perhaps it is not surprising that vacillation has largely been found in relational versus social contexts. In corporate organizations, in his ethnographic study of Amway distributors, Pratt (2000) found vacillation to be a primary response to ambivalence. At times, this vacillation was expressed behaviorally; for example, ambivalently identified distributors were inconsistent in their performance—at times engaged in building the business and selling products, whereas at other times not doing much at all. While he did not posit specific mechanisms, ambivalence seemed to occur when distributors felt a combination of seekership and inadequate encapsulated sensemaking. Put another way, ambivalence occurred when individuals felt the need to improve who they were, but did not listen only to Amway distributors—who were positively inclined toward Amway as a means of improving oneself. Rather, they also listened to skeptical outsiders. Pratt and Doucet (2000) have further found that workers can vacillate—alternately moving toward or against their organization. They argued that vacillation often occurs when ambivalence is "split" between different aspects of a relationship. Splitting is a defense mechanism where individuals nonconsciously separate the positive and negative orientations so that opposition is no longer perceived and responses are more unitary. Children, for example, resolve ambivalence about their parents by seeing one parent as "good" and the other as "bad" (Pratt & Doucet, 2000). Splitting can also occur within the same target of ambivalence. Rowe, Cannella, Rankin, and Gorman (2005), for example, noted that poor team performance may induce sports teams and their fans to be ambivalent about the team, with discomfort avoided by splitting the admired qualities of the team from the poor performance and attributing the latter to other causes such as the coach.

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

Moving Along the Disengagement–Engagement Continuum: A Discussion of Key Moderators

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

Psychologically safe relationships and relational norms. As was the case with the inflexibility–flexibility dimension, strong, secure, and overall "safe" relationships are critical in moving from disengagement toward engagement. Such findings cut across research on relational and social engagement/disengagement. For example, in their analysis of network marketing organizations (e.g., Amway, Mary Kay, and Longaberger), Pratt and Rosa (2003) argued that the development of "family-like" ties was critical to transforming ambivalence into commitment. Similarly, research finds that when social norms and expectations are competitive (e.g., earn as much for yourself as possible), individuals' responses to

observing expressions of ambivalence in their interaction partner are more negatively engaging (aggressive and dominant) rather than positively engaging (Rothman, 2011). By contrast, responses to expressed ambivalence are more positive (integrative and assertive) and less purely aggressive when there are cooperative (e.g., find solutions that benefit both parties) social norms (Rothman & Northcraft, 2015). Further evidence that relational norms matter for transforming ambivalence into positive benefits appears in Ingram and Roberts (2000), who found that in the context of networks of friendships among competitors in Sydney's hotel industry, the greater the cohesion in those networks (i.e., the others that an actor is tied to are also tied to each other), the better the organizational performance. One reason is that cohesive networks are best for norm enforcement.

Roles and task demands. Research also suggests that certain roles and task demands may also serve to moderate the relationship between ambivalence and (dis)engagement. Echoing the findings on safe relationships and norms, research suggests that responses to expressed ambivalence are more positive and less purely aggressive when there are integrative rather than distributive task demands (Rothman & Northcraft, 2015); that is, where it is possible to make trades and expand resources that lead to win–win solutions.[7]

Roles, especially those involving power, also play a critical role in predicting engagement versus disengagement outcomes of ambivalence. To illustrate, negative disengaging reactions appear to occur when the individual expressing ambivalence is an "expert" whose job it is to decide (e.g., a physician making a diagnosis; Marsh & Rothman, 2013). In this context, the division of labor is relatively clear and thus it is may be normative for the expert to show that she or he can effectively decide and act. This may help explain why ambivalent experts elicit negative disengaging reactions from observers, including judgments of reduced expert quality and influence, although future research is needed to explicitly test whether experts are judged more negatively than nonexperts. In a similar vein, it has been argued that more negative disengaging reactions may also appear when the individual who is expressing ambivalence is a leader (Rothman & Melwani, 2017). In making decisions about who appears leader-like and who should emerge as leaders of groups, people use implicit assumptions about the traits, abilities, and even emotions that characterize their ideal business leaders (Epitropaki, Sy, Martin, Tram-Quon, & Topakas, 2013). Ambivalent individuals are unlikely to fit these assumptions and thus are likely to be rejected as leaders, at least in the short term (Rothman et al., 2017). By contrast, ambivalence outcomes appear more positive, proactively assertive and engaged, and less aggressive when the ambivalent individual is a decision-making "partner," with whom one must work interdependently to make a decision (e.g., a negotiation partner rather than opponent; Rothman & Northcraft, 2015). Future research is needed that explicitly manipulates roles (e.g., experts vs. novices; leaders vs. non leaders) or task demands (e.g., distributive vs. integrative; contradictory vs. simple) in the same studies.

Free choice. The level of free choice also appears to moderate the effects of ambivalence on engagement. In the theory of ambivalence transformation by Brickman (1987), free choice determines whether commitments will develop (or not) from ambivalence. For example, individuals are more likely to bind the positive and negative elements of a relationship, leading to increased relational commitment, if they have the autonomy to make the decision to accept both the costs and benefits of a relationship (Pratt & Rosa, 2003). Similarly, in their work on interpersonal trust, Pratt and Dirks (2007:122) note that individuals must "enter a relationship of their own free will . . . One cannot be forced to commit to someone."

It is notable that in the context of relationships, "free choice," or accepting one's positive and negative (ambivalent) experiences freely and thus keeping ambivalence intact, is key for ambivalence to yield engagement in relationships, such as increased commitment and trust, and thus stability. By contrast, in the context of individual decision-making, we reported that not being forced to choose between positive and negative alternatives is key for attenuating the detrimental effect of ambivalence on physiological arousal, uncertainty about the consequences of one's choice, and negative

[7] It has also been argued that observers will perceive the expression of ambivalence positively when the decision context calls for ambivalence because of its complexity. For instance, when leaders express ambivalence in the context of needing to balance competing, contradictory demands from constituents (Rothman & Melwani, 2017) or when an individual is expressing ambivalence about a controversial topic (Maio & Haddock, 2004, 2010; Pillaud et al., 2013), expressed ambivalence is considered more appropriate, and thus positively engaging, because it signals more thoughtful consideration of an issue or situation.

emotions such as regret, anxiety, and fear (van Harreveld et al., 2009a), states that are known to create inflexibility. Indeed, while both "free choice" and "not being forced to choose" allow ambivalence to be maintained, they appear to have different implications for the effects of ambivalence on engagement and flexibility. On the one hand, "free choice" in relationships allows for ambivalence to yield increased consistency and stability within relationships, which are typically considered positive outcomes in that context (and which seem at odds with the notion of flexibility). On the other hand, "not being forced to choose" may promote more flexibility in decision-making, typically considered a positive outcome in that context (and which seems at odds with consistency and stability).

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

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

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

SUMMARY AND MOVING FORWARD

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

Taken together, we have contributed to the field of ambivalence by providing organizing dimensions for the various outcomes of ambivalence, and in doing so synthesizing a vast amount of research from both management and psychology. In addition, by articulating the mechanisms and moderators influencing the relationships between ambivalence and the outcomes associated with it, we open the door for the productive management of ambivalence, a topic rarely addressed in organizational studies [see Pratt and Rosa (2003) for a possible exception regarding relational ambivalence].

To move research in this area even further, we discuss five broad insights from our review that offer promising directions for future ambivalence research in organizational contexts.

1. *We know about the key dimensions, but are only just beginning to know about the relationship between them.* We have offered two major dimensions underlying all outcomes and responses to ambivalence: an *inflexibility–flexibility dimension* and a *disengagement–engagement dimension*. One of the most fundamental differences in how people react to ambivalence is whether their cognitions, emotions, and behaviors become more stable and fixed or more fluid. A second fundamental difference in how people react to ambivalence is whether individuals move toward or away from the object of their ambivalence. We have further argued that a key difference in these dimensions is that research exploring

TABLE 5
Mediators of the Effects of Ambivalence

Inflexibility–Flexibility Dimension		
Outcomes	**Mediators/Mechanisms**	**Authors**
Cognitive inflexibility		
Response amplification (e.g., more extreme responses to different ethnic groups)	Motivation to reduce negative affect	Bell and Esses (2002), Clark et al. (2008), Hass et al. (1991), Katz and Glass (1979), Katz and Hass (1988), MacDonald and Zanna (1998), Nordgren et al. (2006), Nowlis et al. (2002), Pratt and Doucet (2000), Sawicki et al. (2013), Vadera and Pratt (2013)
Reduced ability to decide (i.e., indecision, vacillation, rumination)	Uncertainty Goal conflict Subjective (i.e., felt) ambivalence Reduced confidence	Emmons and King (1988), Nohlen et al. (2015), Sincoff (1990), van Harreveld et al (2009b), Weick (1998)
Confirmation bias	Motivation to reduce negative affect Motivation to reduce subjective ambivalence	Clark et al. (2008), Kleiman and Hassin (2013), Nordgren et al. (2006), Sawicki et al. (2013), van Harreveld et al. (2014)
Compensatory order perceptions (e.g., false perceptions of order, conspiracy beliefs)	Motivation to reduce uncertainty-related negative affect (i.e., anxiety, irritation, doubt) Motivation to reduce subjective ambivalence	van Harreveld et al. (2014)
Cognitive flexibility		
Cognitive breadth and scope of attention (e.g., creativity, openness to alternative perspectives)	Affect as information Unlearning Perspective taking Emotional arousal and alertness	Fong (2006), Meyerson (2001), Plambeck and Weber (2009), Pratt and Barnett (1997), Rees et al. (2013), Rothman and Melwani (2017)
Motivation to engage in balanced processing of multiple perspectives (e.g., advice taking)	Affect as information	Rees et al. (2013), Rothman and Melwani (2017)
Behavioral inflexibility		
Behavioral paralysis	Experienced dilemma (e.g., costs and benefits) Uncertainty	Lüscher and Lewis (2008), Sincoff (1990)
Resistance to change (e.g., neglect, avoidance)	Motivation to reduce negative affect Defensive coping	Piderit (2000), Vince and Broussine (1996)
Behavioral flexibility		
Individual openness to change (e.g., reduced escalation of commitment)	Tentative and reversible commitments Cognitive flexibility Broader organizational participation Unlearning	Plambeck and Weber (2009), Pratt and Barnett (1997), Rothman and Melwani (2017), Weick (1996, 2004)
Interpersonal adaptability (e.g., cross-cultural adaptability)	Attentiveness to own and others' feelings and thoughts Motivation to question and reconsider interpersonal behavior	Kang and Shaver (2004), Molinsky (2013)
Collective adaptability	Wisdom (i.e., balance between knowing and doubting) Mindful organizing	Pradies and Pratt (2016), Schulman (1993), Vogus et al. (2014), Weick (1998, 2004)
Emotional and physical inflexibility		
Psychopathology (e.g., depression, guilt, worthlessness)	Ambivalence is highly internalized Ambivalence is unresolved	Freud (1917), Sincoff (1990)
Reduced psychological health (e.g., life satisfaction, neuroticism, depression)	Inhibition of action toward goals Greater rumination about goals	Emmons and King (1988), Fingerman et al. (2008), Uchino, Holt-Lunstad, Uno, and Flinders (2001)

TABLE 5
(Continued)

Inflexibility–Flexibility Dimension		
Outcomes	**Mediators/Mechanisms**	**Authors**
Emotional and physical inflexibility, cont.		
Reduced psychological health (e.g., life satisfaction, neuroticism, depression) Adverse physical health and well-being (e.g., cellular aging, cardiovascular reactions, inflammation)	Desire for a positive connection relative to ambivalent connections Increased vigilance, sense of uncontrollability, or interpersonal stress Negative affect (e.g., ambivalent friends can be upsetting) Less high-quality emotional support from ambivalent relationship partners Activation of sympathetic nervous system	Emmons and King (1988), Fingerman et al. (2008), Holt-Lunstad, Uchino, Smith, Olson-Cerny, and Nealey-Moore (2003), Holt-Lunstad et al. (2007), Reblin, Uchino, and Smith (2010), Uchino et al (2013), Uchino et al. (2012), Uchino, Holt-Lunstad, Uno, and Flinders (2001), Uchino, Smith, and Berg (2014)
Emotional and physical flexibility		
Psychological resilience (e.g., grief recovery, lower helplessness, decreased depression)	Meaning making Daily positive emotions Problem-focused coping, positive reappraisal	Adler and Hershfield (2012), Bonanno and Keltner (1997), Coifman et al. (2007), Folkman and Moskowitz (2000), Fredrickson (2001), Fredrickson et al. (2003), Larsen, Hemenover, Norris, and Cacioppo (2003), Ong et al. (2006)
Physical resilience (e.g., long-term physical symptoms across sensory, cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, and genitourinary systems)	Meaning making Positive emotions Positive reappraisal of negative situation and downregulation of negative emotion	Davis et al. (2004), Hershfield et al. (2013), Tugade and Fredrickson (2004), Tugade et al. (2004), Zautra et al. (2002), Zautra et al. (2000)

Disengagement–Engagement Dimension		
Outcome	**Mediators/Mechanisms**	**Authors**
Relational disengagement from others (when feel ambivalent)		
Moving away, distancing (e.g., avoidance of customers, lower commitment to organization)	Mixed and conflicted thoughts and feelings Inconsistency, confusion, and inability to cope Generalized confusion and uncertainty Emotional dissonance resulting from emotional labor Social undermining	Bruno et al. (2009), Bushman and Holt-Lunstad (2009), Duffy et al. (2002), Pratt and Doucet (2000), Thompson and Holmes (1996)
Social disengagement from others (when observe expressed ambivalence in others)		
Moving away, distancing from ambivalent other (e.g., negative judgments of experts as lower quality, negotiation partners as less trustworthy)	Perceived indecisiveness Perceived as unpredictable	Belkin and Rothman (2017), Marsh and Rothman (2013)
Relational engagement with others (when feel ambivalent)		
Moving against relationship partners (e.g., negative attitudes toward minority groups, disruptive or unethical behavior in organizations)	Discomfort and motivation to resolve the internal conflict Guilt Emotional dissonance resulting from emotional labor Intense negative attachment	Bell and Esses (2002), Jacobson et al. (1980, 1982), Katz and Glass (1979), Katz et al. (1973), Pratt and Doucet (2000), Vadera and Pratt (2013), Weiss (1976), cited in Thompson and Holmes (1996)
Moving toward relationship partners (e.g., positive attitudes toward minority	Motivation to reduce negative affect Accepting ambivalence in relationship	Brickman (1987); Bushman and Holt-Lunstad, (2009), Gergen and Jones (196)3,

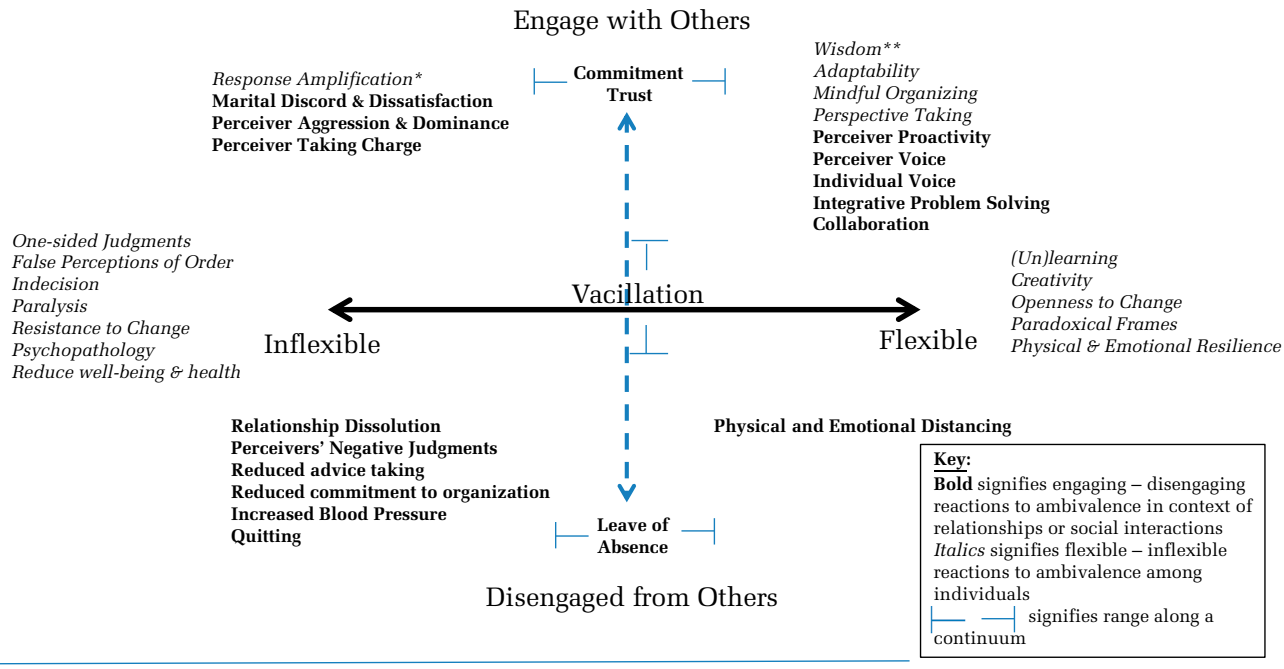
TABLE 5
(Continued)

Disengagement–Engagement Dimension		
Outcome	**Mediators/Mechanisms**	**Authors**
groups; increased trust, commitment, and stability; commitment to organization; increased collaboration and mitigation of competition)	Binding of positive and negative elements by making a free choice to accept both Unlearning of previous habits and ideas and relearning of new ones Higher trust and empathy as well as greater reciprocity Accentuate the negative aspect of the relationship	Ingram and Roberts (2000), Katz and Glass (1979), Pratt and Barnett (1997), Pratt and Dirks (2007), Pratt and Doucet (2000), Pratt and Rosa (2003), Thompson and Holmes (1996)
Social engagement with others (when observe expressed ambivalence in others)		
Moving against partner (e.g., taking charge; taking material advantage of a negotiation partner)	Perceived deliberativeness Perceived submissiveness	Rothman (2011)
Moving toward partner (e.g., creation of higher joint gains in integrative negotiations, motivate greater group engagement)	Perceived submissiveness Perceived cognitive flexibility Doubt and uncertainty in group decision-making processes Openness to other perspectives Flexibility in implementation plans	Gilbert (2006), Plambeck and Weber (2009), Rothman and Melwani (2017), Rothman and Northcraft (2015), Rothman and Wiesenfeld (2007)
Engagement and disengagement: Vacillation		
Vacillation (e.g., children seeking out and resisting contact with primary caregivers, Amway distributors moving toward and against organization)	Perception of caregiver as inconsistent and thus uncertainty about maternal availability Contradictory thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that create "two minds" Splitting defense mechanism (e.g., separating positive and negative orientations) to create simplified responses	Ainsworth et al. (1978), Bowlby (1982), Cassidy and Berlin (1994), Pratt (2000), Pratt and Doucet (2000), Rowe et al. (2005)

inflexibility–flexibility focuses on the effects of ambivalence for decision-making and resilience for a single entity, but does not tend to focus on the effects of ambivalence for relational or social outcomes, whereas research exploring the disengagement–engagement dimension does [see Rothman & Northcraft (2015) for an exception]. Moreover, while there is some discussion of inflexibility–flexibility in research exploring disengagement–engagement in relationships, research in this area has largely been about social and relational outcomes. Indeed, research has tended to explore one dimension or the other. As such, our understanding of how they might interrelate is only just beginning. To begin to better explore how the dimensions interrelate, we mapped the outcomes of ambivalence on the same dimensional space (Figure 1).

This mapping reveals some important insights regarding the effects of ambivalence. One key insight is that foundational research on the engagement and disengagement responses to ambivalence tend toward the "inflexible-engaged" and "inflexible-disengaged" cells, with some research squarely falling on the y-axis representing engaged responses or disengaged responses that can be somewhat flexible or inflexible. Research on the inflexibility and flexibility responses to ambivalence tend to predominately fall on the x-axis, reflecting that these outcomes lead people to neither engage nor disengage from others. More recent scholarship tends toward the "flexible-engaged" cell and has been conducted largely by management rather than psychology scholars. Very limited work, however, appears in the "flexible-but-disengaged" cell. That said, there does appear to be some support that when ambivalence is felt in the context of longer term relationships that are perceived as elective or voluntary, such as friendships, it may elicit flexible-disengaged responses. Specifically, feeling ambivalent about a friend can lead people to flexibly disengage by maintaining the ambivalent friendship

FIGURE 1
Integrating Flexibility and Engagement Dimensions.



* These outcomes in this area are high engage with others and low flexibility. They are also more likely to be realized when concern for self is high
** These outcomes in this area are high engage with others and high flexibility. They are also more likely to be realized when concern for other is high

and frequent contact, but doing so in a more distant and less intimate way: such as distancing one's self physically and emotionally but not exiting the friendship entirely (Bushman & Holt-Lunstad, 2009). This finding suggests to us that when ambivalent relationships are perceived as freely chosen, individuals may be able to endure their ambivalent feelings. Such emotional regulation may, in turn, allow ambivalent individuals to respond relatively more flexibly. More research, however, should explore this "off-diagonal" response.

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

For example, Rothman (2011) suggested that inflexible-engaged responses to observing expressed emotional ambivalence in an interaction partner are most likely when concern for others is low (e.g., competitive social norms), and/or tasks are narrow (e.g., only distributive negotiation potential). By contrast, Rothman and Northcraft (2015) in follow-up research suggested that flexible-engaged responses to observing emotional ambivalence in an interaction partner are most likely when concern for others is high (e.g., cooperative social norms), and/or tasks are broad (e.g., integrative negotiation potential) [see also Rothman and Melwani (2017)]. In contrast to these short-term interactions, inflexible-disengaged responses to feeling ambivalent appear likely when the ambivalence is felt in a longer term relationship. For instance, when individuals feel both strongly positive and strongly negative about a romantic partner or supervisor they are more likely to disengage by ending the romantic relationship (Thompson & Holmes, 1996), avoiding work responsibilities (Pratt & Doucet, 2000), and

reducing commitment to the organization (Duffy et al., 2002).

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

2. *We have a fundamental grasp of the positive and negative outcomes of ambivalence, but such understanding is likely still too simplistic*. Similar to our arguments about the dimensions of ambivalence responses, we also believe that we need to push forward our understanding of positive and negative outcomes of ambivalence in two primary ways. First, just as we need to know more about the conditions under which certain types of responses to ambivalence are likely to occur, we also need a more fine-grained understanding of when these specific response are "positive" or "negative"—or perhaps better said—when they are they more likely to lead to beneficial and functional outcomes rather than deleterious ones. Looking broadly at the theories that predict negative versus positive outcomes, we think affect is likely to play a critical role. For example, psychologists often assume that as a result of having ambivalent attitudes or cognitions, negative affect occurs, which, in turn, often leads to dysfunctional outcomes as people become highly motivated to rid themselves of their ambivalence and or the negative affect it creates. Management theorists, by contrast, have tended to assume that ambivalent emotions—not simply negative ones—accompany the state of ambivalence. Moreover, it is the experience of multiple and conflicting emotions that cues individuals to take a broader look at the world (i.e., with more flexible cognitions) and respond in a more adaptive manner (Rothman & Melwani, 2017).

While we continue to believe that the experience of both positive and negative affect is critical to unlocking the positive potential of ambivalence, we also believe researchers have only begun to scratch the surface of understanding what the nature of the positive and negative affect might be, or even the conditions under which single affective responses to cognitive ambivalence may lead to beneficial and functional outcomes. To illustrate with negative affect, such affect has been operationalized in many different ways in the existing research, including as uncertainty-related negative emotions, regret, negative physiological arousal, and guilt. We suspect that the positive affect associated with ambivalence may be similarly varied (e.g., excitement, curiosity, hope, surprise). Considering what we know about the different effects of discrete negative emotions (e.g., Lerner & Keltner, 2000) and mixed emotions (e.g., Rees et al., 2013) on cognition and behavior, future research should attempt to clarify which types of positive and negative patterns of emotions are thought to mediate certain types of responses, and under what conditions. Research should also explore when ambivalence leads to more singular emotional responses. As Brickman (1987) noted, the positive or negative "face" of ambivalence may be experienced in a given ambivalent relationship at different times. We believe that the nature of this positive or negative face may be critical. For example, the experience of guilt from an ambivalent relationship may lead to positive results if it facilitates perspective taking (Melwani & Rothman, 2015).

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

problematic if fast and deliberate action is needed, meaning that this type of flexible response may actually be a negative outcome of ambivalence.

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

Dialecticism is thinking about a thing and its opposite without necessarily feeling that they are contradictory (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). On the one hand, dialecticism has been theorized to increase resilient responses to ambivalence. Positive and negative emotions are considered less conflicting and more compatible (Bagozzi, Wong, & Yi, 1999; Schimmack, Oishi, & Diener, 2002) in dialectical (i.e., Eastern) cultures than in less dialectical (i.e., Western) cultures. Individuals from dialectical cultures also tend to report more mixed emotions and to report them in response to both positive and negative events (Hui et al., 2009). In dialectical cultures, rather than forcing one to choose between sides or force a preference for one perspective over another, opposites can coexist and persist peacefully in a type of balanced harmony (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Thus, during negative events, because individuals may not feel forced to resolve their ambivalence, positive can be added to the negative to create ambivalence, thus allowing individuals to "take the good with the bad" (Larsen et al., 2003). These results imply that in dialectical cultures, the detrimental effects of ambivalence for well-being may be attenuated, the positive effects on resilience may be increased, or perhaps both effects may occur simultaneously.

However, there is also reason to believe that dialecticism could decrease cognitively flexible responses to experiencing emotional ambivalence. Fong (2006) demonstrated that the perception of emotional ambivalence as *unusual* (i.e., "usually, people feel either happy or sad; they don't feel both simultaneously") is a critical moderator of the effect of ambivalence on creativity. Indeed, only participants in her experiment who believed that the experience of emotional ambivalence was unusual (and who were experiencing emotional ambivalence) demonstrated increased creativity scores. Emotionally ambivalent participants who believed that emotional ambivalence was common actually showed decreased creativity scores in comparison to the neutral participants. These findings suggest that

[8] For instance, Sawicki et al. (2013) suggested that ambivalent attitudes will narrow individuals' attention, increasing confirmatory information seeking (i.e., preferences for proattitudinal information) in order to resolve the tension and conflict of the ambivalent state, but only when people lack knowledge about the issue. Presumably, seeking new information that is consistent with one's attitudes can be used to resolve the tension of the ambivalent state. However, when people are more knowledgeable about the issue, this preference for confirmatory information disappears, presumably because the familiar information is perceived to be relatively ineffective at reducing ambivalence.

individuals are using the experience of emotional ambivalence as a signal that they are in an unusual environment and responding to that signal with an increased attention to associations, thus resulting in increased creativity. These results also suggest, however, that individuals experiencing ambivalence in dialectical cultures, when positive and negative emotions are considered less unusual, may be less likely to reap the cognitive flexibility benefits of this emotional state.

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

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

We believe that many of our major insights came from looking at research across the psychological and managerial divide, as well as the micro-macro divide. Thus, we believe that future research should take a more interdisciplinary, cross-level approach. One example in which cross-pollination of psychological and managerial research would be fruitful is research on the effects of ambivalence on adaptability. Many of the articles examining the link between ambivalence and psychological resilience, on the one hand, and collective adaptability, on the other, examine difficult and threatening contexts such as when CEOs are coping with significant events (e.g., Plambeck & Weber, 2009), individuals are working in especially high-hazard settings (e.g., Weick, 1996), or HROs (e.g., Roberts, 1990), individuals are navigating a new cultural milieu (e.g., Molinsky, 2013), leaders are dealing with change (Rothman & Melwani, 2017), or individuals are coping with stressful life events or life circumstances (e.g., Ong et al., 2006). Each of these situations are characterized by complex, dynamic, and otherwise uncertain conditions, and it is in these contexts that negative reactions such as anxiety, uncertainty, and doubt are natural responses. However, it is also in these contexts that the openness and responsiveness (by individuals, dyads, groups, and collectives) at the core of adaptive action are especially critical (Dane, 2010), and thus where ambivalence—adding positive thoughts and emotions to the negative—may be particularly beneficial. Thus, it is precisely in contexts such as these that it would be particularly generative and reciprocally useful for the psychological research on the benefits of ambivalence for individual-level resilience and the managerial research on collective-level adaptability that can stem from ambivalence to speak to one another more explicitly. Indeed, both organizations and individuals appear to use ambivalence to increase adaptation and adaptability, and these literatures would be well served by drawing on one another even more.

We also believe it is critical for more cross-pollination of research across levels of analysis. A related example for future research to examine is how ambivalence dynamics vary within and across levels of analysis in organizational contexts. To illustrate, one common theme in extant work is that under certain conditions ambivalence can increase individual, interpersonal, and group flexibility because it makes people more receptive and open to alternative perspectives (Pratt & Pradies, 2011; Rothman & Melwani, 2017). At the individual level, the experience of ambivalence can lead to greater cognitive flexibility (e.g., Fong, 2006). Similarly, at the interpersonal level, expressing ambivalence in a negotiation can increase flexible integrative bargaining in others (e.g., Rothman & Northcraft, 2015) as well as lead to more engaged followers, perhaps because it increases perceptions of a leader's flexibility (Rothman & Melwani, 2017). At the group and organizational level, ambivalence is thought to increase flexibility to the extent that it increases search for information and input from others, as well as discussion of that input (Plambeck & Weber, 2009; Rothman & Wiesenfeld, 2007), the reduction of group conformity, and increased cognitive complexity of group decision-making (Rothman & Wiesenfeld, 2007), as well as enhance organizational adaptability (Weick, 1998, 2004) and mindful organizing (Vogus et al., 2014). These effects cross levels of analysis in that these collective-level effects are

theorized to occur in part because of the cognitive flexibility that ambivalent *individuals* bring to their groups and collectives, and in part because of the flexibility that can be realized when ambivalence is expressed in *social interactions*. However, very little work has actually examined these cross-level effects or unpacked the reciprocal (whether symmetrical or asymmetrical) and dynamic nature of these effects over time. This provides yet another fruitful path for inquiry into the potentially positive results of ambivalence in and around organizations.

5. *There is general consensus about how to define ambivalence, but less awareness about how ambivalence is measured across disciplines*. While positivity and negativity have often been conceptualized as opposite ends of a bipolar continuum and are measured that way with Likert-type scales, scholars have developed an alternative perspective that contends that positivity and negativity represent separable processes and are better conceptualized in terms of a bivariate space as opposed to a bipolar continuum, and should thus be measured that way (see evaluative space model; Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Cacioppo et al., 1997; Cacioppo,Gardner, and Berntson, 1999). Indeed, doing so resolves a primary issue with Likert-type scales, which is that it is impossible to differentiate indifference from ambivalence using these methods. Indeed, it is unclear if individuals intend their midpoint responses to mean "neither positive nor negative" or to mean "equally positive and negative." In their seminal work, Scott (1966) and Kaplan (1972) have provided a framework and standardized procedure to assess positive and negative ratings toward an attitude object, and it has become the most common approach to studying ambivalent attitudes and emotions since (e.g., Larsen et al., 2001).[9]

CONCLUSION

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

[9] For discussion and comparison of the various mathematical models, see Breckler (1994), Priester and Petty (1996, 2001), and Thompson et al. (1995). For comparisons of different ways to elicit and measure emotional ambivalence, see Berrios, Totterdell, and Kellett (2015) and Larsen and McGraw (2011).

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